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From Novel to Film:
Claude Chabrol's adaptations of
Ruth Rendell's
A Judgement in Stone (La Cérémonie)
And
The Bridesmaid (La Demoiselle d'Honneur)

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Abstract

This study aims to define technicalities of filmic adaptations through two specific examples. Ruth Rendell's *A Judgement in Stone* and *The Bridesmaid* were both adapted by French director Claude Chabrol. Based on film theory by Keith Reader and Phil Powrie, Anne Goliot-Leté and Francis Vanoye, and Laurent Jullier, and on more specific adaptation theory by Robert Stam, this study focuses on the main issues that arise when a director decides to work with a literary text as a basis for a film-script.

From a literary angle of study, the questions of focalisation and organisation of the diegesis will be dealt with by using Genette's criteria. Narrative tools will be compared to filmic ones and the study will evidence differences in the range of devices each artist might use, and their different effects. The study of these two cases will lead to wider conclusions on the narrative side of the adaptation process.

The second focus of this dissertation will be the concept of film *genres*, as theorised by Rick Altman. The films in our corpus will be analysed through the lenses of the three film *genres* they belong to. This part of the study will further evidence that Chabrol based his works on Rendell's novels but he also added elements to them, which resulted in a dense generic textile that goes even further than Rendell's original literary *genrification*.

Lastly, the dissertation will try to define the two authors' styles and lead a comparative analysis of their values and works. As that they did not produce their works at the same time and have never been working together, questions arise on the relevance of one's themes to the other. Works by Susan Rowland about Rendell and Guy Austin and Joel Magny about Chabrol will help define and compare the two artists' values, and show their numerous similarities.

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Introduction

French film director Claude Chabrol and British crime novelist Ruth Rendell are both renowned in their art. They both started amongst a groundbreaking current (female crime fiction writers for Rendell and the *Nouvelle Vague* for Chabrol) and then drew their own path, raising enthusiasm both in critics and in the audience. When it comes to their works, Chabrol and Rendell tend to be interested in themes that can be seen as common: murder, class struggle, suspense, search for the self and relationships. As an avid reader, Claude Chabrol has adapted many novels on screen in order to share them with his audience and to apply filmic tools to plots he enjoyed as a reader. Amongst these adaptations are *La Cérémonie* (1995) and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* (2004), based on Rendell's *A Judgement in Stone* (1977) and *The Bridesmaid* (1989). In this dissertation, I shall study these adaptations from various points of view – defined by film theory in general and film adaptation theory in particular – aiming to highlight the differences between source-novels and their adaptations, which necessarily stem from Chabrol's choices and constraints. This dissertation will also compile definitions of concepts crucial to both literature and film studies such as narratology and *genre* theory, and of concepts exclusive to cinema such as camera angles.

Cinema has always been a source of fascination for intellectuals. The more the filmic tool developed, the more it was widened and deepened, sometimes used as a propaganda medium, sometimes as a way to express the wish for political or social changes. Film adaptation is a very recent trend of visual studies; as can be seen in by my bibliography, it is not until the early

twenty-first century that film adaptation started raising interest amongst academics. Until then, “adaptations [were] seen as parasitical on literature, they [were said to] burrow into the body of the source text and steal its vitality”¹ as put by Robert Stam, who is the main initiator of adaptation studies.

The central question for this dissertation will be “how does Claude Chabrol adapt Ruth Rendell’s novels?” This study will focus on medium-specific features (the differences they incur and the ways to deal efficiently with them), on the issue of *genre* and its complications, and it will highlight features that are common to Rendell’s and Chabrol’s aesthetics.

I shall firstly analyse the narrative issues Chabrol encounters when adapting Rendell’s novels. I will study these issues through the lens of medium-specific tools and see how effective filmic devices are at conveying meaning across to the audience (compared to literary ones). This part of the study will focus on narrative levels, focalisation and characterisation. After assessing these differences, I shall highlight the diegetic changes operated by Chabrol when he adapts Rendell’s novels. I will consider diegetic events, treatment of the diegetic time and diegetic rooting into spatial and historical settings. This part of my study will finish with the concept of “strong narration” that I shall define and apply to the character of Flora.

The second chapter of this dissertation will be centred on the notion of *genre* in cinema. I shall provide an overview of *genre* theory stating what *genre* is, giving its uses and having a brief look at its evolution. I shall then turn

¹ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.7.

my attention to three film *genres* and see how they can be applied to *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, basing my argument both on aesthetic and on diegetic clues.

The last chapter of this dissertation will define Rendell's and Chabrol's aesthetics. I shall show how the authors belong to certain "categories" of writers and film-makers but also how they differ from these categories to which they do not necessarily feel they belong. I shall then study common features of their works in order to assess whether or not Rendell's oeuvres are written in a "Chabrolian" way.

Plots and names' equivalents

1. Synopses of *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*

La Cérémonie features Sophie, a young illiterate woman, who is hired as a maid by the Lelièvre family. The Lelièvres live in an isolated mansion in Brittany. The family counts four members: Catherine and Georges, the parents, who have no children together but one each from previous marriages. Gilles is Catherine and her ex-husband's son. He is a lonely teenager who loves reading and has a passion for arts in general. Melinda is Georges' and his late wife's daughter. She studies at university and only spends the weekends at home, where she invites her boyfriend Jérémie. The household chores are excessive for Catherine – who owns her own art gallery – so she requires a maid's help and hires Sophie. The viewer finds out later that Sophie is illiterate and has history of violence since she is believed to have killed her handicapped father, or at least not to have rescued him from the fire she might have set in his house. Once in the small village, Sophie meets Jeanne, the postmistress, who occasionally works in a charity and reads a lot. However, Jeanne proves to be a bad influence on the maid since she is jealous and aggressive towards a lot of people, including the Lelièvres. The two friends meet regularly either for a charity project (that they end up ruining) or for a film; television being Sophie's main pastime. Sophie is treated rather nicely at the Lelièvres who mean well towards her but their patronising attitude and the affection they have for each other create a feeling of jealousy and frustration both in Sophie and in Jeanne. This frustration reaches its climax when Georges gives Sophie the sack for having blackmailed Melinda, who found out about the maid's illiteracy. It is what

triggers the climax of the film, which sees Sophie and Jeanne seize Georges' shotguns and murder the family who were watching an opera on television. Jeanne leaves the crime scene and is killed in a car accident by the priest who had given her the sack from the charity she worked for. Sophie, for her part, walks away from the house after having concealed proofs of their misdeed, making her way through the police squads coming for the accident. The end credits begin with the music of the opera that is being played back on Melinda's tape-recorder, which Jeanne stole and put in her car. At the end of the credits, the gunshots can be heard and then the voices of Jeanne and Sophie are the evidence that the police can use to first find the bodies and then convict Sophie... but that will never be shown or even hinted at.

La Demoiselle d'Honneur is mainly a love story between Philippe and Senta, who meet when Philippe's older sister gets married to Senta's cousin. The relationship is seen on a daily basis, and the love they share seems to grow to the point when they cannot live apart. However, Senta plays with Philippe's feelings and tests his reactions by ignoring him to make sure he really is the one for her. This test goes a step further when Senta exposes to Philippe the rules of a game supposed to be a proof of one's love: it involves writing a poem, planting a tree, having sex with someone of the same gender and killing someone. Philippe thinks it is a joke but, being unsure, he flies into a temper and blames Senta's lunacy. By fear of losing her, he decides to make up a fake murder (surprisingly avoiding all other steps) to satisfy her. Senta then tells him about a murder she committed against his mother's ex-boyfriend. Philippe gets worried and checks if what Senta says is true: he finds the man and realises

she did not kill him. However, when Philippe's younger sister is arrested for theft, the policemen tell him about a crime that was committed the very same way as that described by Senta and he realises that she just missed her target. He runs back to her in order to get an explanation but all he gets is a confirmation, and the confession to another murder she committed even before they met. She opens a closet in her attic and unveils the corpse of her first victim, a young woman who was reported missing since the very first shots of the film. The film ends with the lovers lying on Senta's bed in the basement where she lives, with sounds of the police coming to fetch the criminal after following Philippe when he ran back to her.

2. Name equivalents table

<i>A Judgement in Stone</i>	<i>La Cérémonie</i>	<i>The Bridesmaid</i>	<i>La Demoiselle d'Honneur</i>
Eunice Parchman (the maid)	Sophie Bonhomme	Senta Pelham	Senta Bellange
Joan Smith (the postmistress)	Jeanne Marchal	Philip Wardman	Philippe Tardieu
Jacqueline Coverdale (the mother)	Catherine Lelièvre	Christine Wardman (Philippe's mother)	Christine Tardieu
George Coverdale (the father)	Georges Lelièvre	Cheryl Wardman (Philip's sister)	Patricia Tardieu
Melinda Coverdale (George's child)	Melinda Lelièvre	Fiona Wardman (Philip's sister)	Sophie Tardieu
Giles Mont (Jacqueline's son)	Gilles ?	Darren ? (Fiona's husband)	Jacky ?
Lowfield Hall (the mansion)	?	Gerard Arnham (Christine's fiancé)	Gérard Courtois
Stantwich, Suffolk, UK	St-Coulomb, Brittany, France	Rebecca Neave (Senta's first victim)	Raphaëlle Pélissier

I. What narrative changes did Rendell's novels go through when adapted into films by Chabrol?

As Anne Goliot-Lété puts it, “On ne peut prétendre travailler sur le sens d'un film sans convoquer d'emblée et en synchronie l'histoire et la manière”.¹ In this chapter, I will, therefore, aim to show the different processes which the narrative aspects of the novels undergo when Chabrol adapts them, alongside the impact on the diegesis they have. I will study three key-points of the adaptation process as regards narration, aiming to define how Chabrol adapts these novels, both from a medium-specific angle and from a diegetic one.

“Film's arsenal of pictures, movement, perception, mise-en-scène, shadow, character, and sound create an identity which, to the senses, feels more than real words on the page”.² Maureen Quinn states here that a film and a book do not use the same tools to convey the diegesis; therefore, I shall start this chapter with an analysis of the formal changes that takes place in the adaptation process.

This study aims to show the inherent specificity of each medium and I shall state whether the formal changes are direct consequences of these medium-specific features. This chapter will then turn to a study of the diegetic analysis and focus on the impact one single amendment can have on the remainder of the plot itself. This part of the chapter will also investigate the

¹ Anne Goliot-Lété, *Précis d'Analyse Filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p.32.

² Maureen Quinn, *The Adaptation of a Literary Text to Film* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p.9.

different ways Chabrol and Rendell deal with diegetic time and the effect produced on the audience, along with the diegetic rooting in spatial and temporal settings. This study will lead me to think about the “fidelity discourse [which] assumes that a novel contains an extractable essence, a kind of heart of the artichoke hidden underneath the surface details of style”.³ As a closure to this chapter, I will work on the notion of strong narration – that I will define – and study its rendering in the adaptations. I will then prove that Chabrol renders Rendell’s strong narrative voices in his adaptations, basing my argument on specific case studies.

A. Formal changes due to medium-specific constraints

“Le travail est plus important [quand on écrit un scénario à partir d’une idée originale] car on doit réaliser soi-même ce qu’on trouverait tout prêt dans un livre : construire une intrigue”.⁴ For Chabrol, adapting a novel into a film is a matter of transfer, from one medium to another, of Stam’s “extractable essence, a kind of heart of the artichoke hidden underneath the surface details of style”⁵ quoted above. It is therefore interesting to examine more closely the medium-specific features of Chabrol’s adaptation of Rendell’s novels. I shall define the medium-specific changes implied by this

³ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.15.

⁴ Claude Chabrol et François Guérif, *Comment faire un film* (Paris, Payot et Rivages, 2004), p.22.

⁵ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.15.

transfer of the main four narrative aspects of story-telling: the narrative levels, the time of narration, the focalisation of the story and the processes of characterisation. My study of these features will be based on Genette's works in narratology, Goliot-Lété's film studies and Metz's theory of the filmic point-of-view.

1. The narrative levels

In both his films, Chabrol adopts the strategy employed by Rendell in *The Bridesmaid*, delegating the narration of the murders to the murderers themselves (with the exception of the Lelièvres' murder, which stands apart). He thus creates a series of levels of narration, embedding stories told by characters within the main story shown by the camera.

The main stories are told as "récits mimétiques", a term used by Laurent Jullier to define "une narration qui se cache [et qui] relève de la mimésis ou de la narration hétérodiégétique"⁶ as opposed to a "narration déléguée", which would see the intervention of a personified narrator, and to "renvois à la narration", which would feature hints given by characters' speeches, suggesting their own fictionality.

Although the sublevel strategy is not used by Rendell in *A Judgement in Stone*, Chabrol chooses to apply it to his adaptation anyway, having dismissed the use of voice-over comment to give background information because of the documentary or historical impression it conveys. In the novel, the narrator provides the reader with all the information about the

⁶ Laurent Jullier, *L'Analyse de Séquences 2è Ed.* (Paris, Armand Collin Cinéma, 2007), p.46.

past deeds of the protagonists, but Chabrol prefers to let the characters explain themselves. This gives the impression of a plea, and the judge here is the viewer, who is manipulated by the killers. The only murder actually shown by one of the adaptations in the scope of my corpus is that of the Lelièvres. This murder follows Jeanne's explanation of the death of her child and it appears brutal, disorganised and cruel. The fact that it is the only murder featured in the main narrative framework of the film gives it a specificity which may be attributed to the ideological character of this murder (see III.C.2.b) below).

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Chabrol follows Rendell's novel in its treatment of the murders. Here, the murderers describe their deeds in a conversation with their partner and the murder itself does not feature in the main narrative frameworks, namely the "shown" in the film and the "*récit*" told by the main narrator in the novel. Allowing the murderers to describe their deeds creates an effect of linkage between them and their crime, of which they are completely aware. The telling of this event transforms it into a rationalised fact that no longer belongs in the realm of – sometimes thoughtless – actions but is rather aligned with language, thoughts and conscience. It also highlights the fact that Senta feels no remorse for what she did and is very comfortable with explaining it in detail to Philip. On the other hand, the young man, who did not perpetrate a crime but merely invented one in order to fit within Senta's sick game, seems to be very ill-at-ease with giving details about the murder. This creates a mirror effect between him as an innocent man and Senta as a pitiless criminal. Finally, the murder of Rebecca

Neave/Raphaëlle Pélissier is not shown either. It is only told by one of Philip's sisters (Fiona, the eldest, in the novel; and Patricia, the youngest, in the film) who fantasises about the news report she heard. The ending of the diegesis reveals that the story invented by Philip's sister is, in fact, close to what really happened to the victim, and Senta, who perpetrated the murder, acts as a revealing character on the fact that, no matter how unreal and cruel the fantasy seems, it can happen as long as it can be imagined.

Chabrol keeps very close to Rendell's treatment of the murders, whose narrative strategy results in a closer link between the murderers and their deeds. Thus, it is made even easier for the viewer to hold the killers responsible for their actions than it was for the reader, who faced a detachment of the criminals from their crimes. Chabrol dismantles this detachment, which stemmed from the fact that the novels used the killers themselves as narrators of their own crimes.

2. “Focalisation mentale et focalisation visuelle”

Christian Metz defines three types of focalisation: “focalisation mentale” (dealing with whose point-of-view on the diegesis is given), “focalisation visuelle” (also known as subjective viewing) and “focalisation auditive” (also known as sound in and sound off).⁷ I shall study the films of my corpus in the light of the first two categories, leaving aside the “focalisation auditive”, which would call for an in-depth analysis based on Michel Chion's theory of filmic soundtracks that would fall outside the scope of my study.

⁷ Christian Metz, *L'énonciation Impersonnelle ou le Site du Film* (Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), p.115.

a) “Focalisation mentale”

Rendell uses many different focalisation strategies in her novels: in *The Bridesmaid*, the focaliser seems to be Philip, and the reader is given little information other than what Philip is experiencing, feeling or being told. Chabrol's film also adopts this type of focalisation, putting the viewer in an uncomfortable situation where he/she does not know anything more than what Philippe knows. The viewer is thus forced to formulate his/her own hypotheses and, convergent with Philip's own knowledge, only discovers at the end of the “*récit*” (i.e. the succession of elements narrated) the crime that was perpetrated first in the “*histoire*” (i.e. the sequence of events as they occurred in the fictitious framework), thus unequivocally identifying Senta as a killer.

A Judgement in Stone has a different pattern of focalisation to that of *The Bridesmaid*. Indeed, instead of being focalised through the main character's point-of-view, it is focalised through the narrator's. Therefore, the reader is completely dependent on the amount of information the narrator is willing to impart. As will be shown below, the narrator in this novel does not stand at a distance and is very biased. This lack of intra-diegetic focaliser results in the reader's restricted awareness of the diegesis, which is rendered only partially and in a non-objective way. However, one needs to bear in mind that “il n'y a pas de transparence ni d'objectivité... tout est acte

d'énonciation"⁸ as stated by Laurent Jullier about cinema; a theory which also applies to literary works.

As regards focalisation in cinema, the definition Christian Metz gives is based on Gérard Genette's conception of point-of-view in literature as "personnalisations de la source informative, sans que l'orientation optique suive, et sans que le cadrage se démarque en rien de l'ordinaire".⁹ In light of this definition, it is apparent that Chabrol uses the same type of focalisation in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, as Rendell did in her novel, where the information given to the viewer is the same as the information Philippe gets. He is the main character and the story of the film is his story. The viewer never loses tracks of Philippe and makes his/her way through the story at the same time as the protagonist, simultaneously discovering Senta's murders.

In *La Cérémonie*, the main focaliser seems to be Sophie. The maid is the central character and she is the one through whom the viewer gets to know the other characters, and it is within her arrival and departure that the story is encompassed. Sophie can be seen as an anti-hero for her life does not arouse envy in the viewer's mind and she is a rather plain character.

It is worth noting that both films feature shifts in focalisation, that is to say scenes where the main focaliser is deprived of his/her focalising role which is taken over by another character. These small-scale shifts are inserted to prove a point that will make a difference to the whole plot but of

⁸ Laurent Jullier, *L'Analyse de Séquences 2è Ed.* (Paris, Armand Collin Cinéma, 2007), p.46.

⁹ Christian Metz, *L'énonciation Impersonnelle ou le Site du Film* (Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), p.115.

which the main focaliser is unaware. For instance, *La Cérémonie* opens with Catherine Lelièvre as a focaliser, although Sophie Bonhomme is the main focaliser in the film. This opening serves to hint that Sophie needs to ask people where the café is, although she is standing right in front of it, because she is incapable of reading the signs due to her condition. However, the maid is quickly given the focalising role, signalling that she has seized power over Catherine and will now be the deciding character (the second scene in which Sophie appears shows Catherine who is downgraded to the function of driver, coming to fetch her at the railway station). In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, when Philippe telephones Senta and she is shown sitting on her bed, refusing to answer the telephone, the focalisation changes from Philippe to Senta, thus letting the viewer know that the telephone call has gone through but she is deliberately ignoring it.

The focalisation patterns of *A Judgement in Stone* are amended whereas those of *The Bridesmaid* remain the same. Chabrol makes these changes in order to sustain the same type of focalisation in the two adaptations: the homodiegetic focalisation, which makes the viewer feel closer to the focalising character and feel part of his/her story.

b) “Focalisation visuelle”

Metz's visual focalisation¹⁰ (which is further explained by Goliot-Lété¹¹) can be different in each and every sequence and thus does not seem

¹⁰ Christian Metz, *L'énonciation Impersonnelle ou le Site du Film* (Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), p.115.

¹¹ Anne Goliot-Lété & Francis Vanoye, *Précis d'analyse filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p. 40.

to offer valuable insights when applied to the larger scale of a whole film. According to Goliot-Lété, one must pose the following questions when analysing “focalisation visuelle”:

D'où voit-on ce que l'on voit? D'où est prise l'image? Où la camera est-elle placée? [...] Qui voit? Le point-de-vue (visuel) est-il celui d'un personnage (image dite parfois subjective) ou d'un narrateur extérieur à l'histoire? L'image est-elle attribuable à un personnage ou au film?¹²

The final question seems to view film as an entity to which one could attribute narrative or focalising powers. It would then lead to the question of whether this entity is prior to a homodiegetic narrator or if it only takes over from him/her at specific points in the diegesis. This question would be very wide-reaching and of undoubted interest in the scope of a longer and broader study. This part of my study on visual focalisation, however, will concentrate on the high-angle shots used once in each of the films in the corpus.

In *La Cérémonie*, the shot I propose to study occurs just before the only murder shown on screen in the film. The soon-to-be killers, Sophie and Jeanne, have come back to the masters' house in order to collect Sophie's belongings and leave the house for good, since the maid has been fired for having blackmailed a member of the family. Once in the house, Sophie and Jeanne are overridden by a madness that leads them to tear up Mrs Lelièvre's clothes, pour hot chocolate on her bed and laugh out loud at their deeds. The

¹² Anne Goliot-Lété & Francis Vanoye, *Précis d'analyse filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p. 40.

high-angle view is a subjective shot from Sophie's point-of-view. It could potentially be argued that it represents Jeanne's perspective; however, once Jeanne is gone, Sophie stays for a second and continues to look at the family, who appear again in the next shot. This shot aims to show the power Sophie and Jeanne have over the Lelièvres, who look powerless and completely unaware of the fate that is looming over them (see Figure 1). This is all the more evident when one compares this shot to the one that is inserted between shots of the Lelièvres in the drawing-room, in which Sophie and Jeanne are shown from a slight low-angle view, granting them power (see Figure 2). It is interesting to note that this example corresponds exactly to Metz's description of an effective subjective shot:

Pour que le spectateur puisse prendre à son compte ce que voit un personnage, il faut que juste avant, ou juste après, en tout cas pas trop loin, il voie ce personnage lui-même – c'est un cas de suture par contre-champ optique.¹³

¹³ Christian Metz, *L'énonciation Impersonnelle ou le Site du Film* (Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), p.115.



Figure 1: The Lelièvres are powerless



Figure 2: Sophie and Jeanne seize power

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, the low-angle shot comes prior to the high-angle one. It occurs during one of the many times when Philippe tries to locate his lover who will not answer his telephone calls. It shows, from the outside, the window of Senta's room in the basement, where Philippe and, through him, the viewer expect Senta to be. The low-angle view, here, is a

judgement on Senta's way of life. The darkness of the window, the dirt around it and its size represent all the negative feelings the viewer (and Philippe) have for this place (see Figure 3). By contrast, the end of the scene is a high-angle view from the attic window. It is, therefore, filmed from the inside, and the light from the outside contrasts with the dark window-frame. It is hard to tell whether this window is bigger or not than that of the basement, but as it occupies the whole shot and is even too big to fit into it, it feels bigger to the viewer. As regards the characters in this shot, they are parting after the first and only dialogic intervention of Senta's mother, who seems to have made a big impression on Philippe who cannot take his eyes off of her. It is interesting to note that although the viewer expected to see Senta in the basement and was disappointed, it is not easy to attest to Senta's presence in the attic. She is probably the focaliser in this shot, which would give her a supreme power over the characters, and particularly Philippe, in a similar way to Jeanne and Sophie's superior position in *La Cérémonie*. However, nothing ever proves this and the shot might be an unfocalised one (or one focalised by the film itself, as Goliot-Lété's theory seems to imply¹⁴), aiming to show Philippe's powerlessness in his relationship with Senta, who obviously decides whether or not she wants him in the house (see Figure 4). However, the focalising character here is in fact a secondary matter: Philippe and the viewer will learn in the end that Raphaëlle Pélissier (a young woman who has gone missing as shown in the news report at the beginning of the film) was kept in the attic once dead. This high-angle shot aims to introduce the attic as a key-place in

¹⁴ Anne Goliot-Lété and Francis Vanoye, *Précis d'analyse filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p.33.

the house, and to make the viewer aware of the fact that the door that is locked at the top of the staircase does lead to an unknown room, which will only be revealed at the end of the film.



Figure 3: Senta's dreadful place



Figure 4: High-angle shot in Senta's attic

3. Characterisation

According to Genette's definition of characterisation, two types of protagonists can be found in a novel: round characters and flat ones. Genette's definition of a flat character corresponds to a character who does

not have many facets, who is quickly and roughly depicted. A round character would be a character that is defined in more detail, sometimes throughout the whole book, and about whom the reader can hardly make a judgement due to the lack of information given.

Amongst the flat and round characters, some characters may also have the second characteristic of being didactic, i.e. their experience throughout the diegesis presents the reader with a series of facts that he/she can take into account to improve their own personal life.

Characters may be described either by the narrator (direct characterisation), or the reader can create his/her own portrait of a character thanks to the diegetic moves he/she plays a part in (indirect characterisation). Direct and indirect characterisations are independent from round and flat characters in that they focus on how, or rather by whom, a character is described. By contrast, round and flat characters have to do with the character's attitude and personality. It is interesting to note that, although characterisation in cinema studies does not seem to be a very prolific field, the definitions given by Genette of literary characterisation can be applied to film analysis without any major changes.

In *A Judgement in Stone*, the narrator gives away many clues about the characters, their past, feelings and behaviour. However, this direct characterisation is uneven: the flat characters (all but Eunice and Melinda) are depicted quite clearly in the first few pages of the novel, the narrator leaving no space for imagination about them. The reader knows about George and

Jacqueline that after “six years of marriage, [George] hadn’t got used to the wonder of it, the miracle that he had found in her” and about Giles, Jacqueline wonders “Had he heard any of this? Was he in the least bit interested?” (p.10), revealing the young man’s introversion. Eunice and Melinda, being the didactic characters from whom the viewer can infer what not to do, are depicted in an indirect way. They are round characters since the narrator will not give a precise and straightforward description of them but he/she will give clues to the reader throughout the story, the reader being the one who will build his/her own portrait of these characters.

In what ways can Eunice and Melinda be qualified as didactic characters? Melinda first, will try to teach her parents, and therefore the reader, how to pay more respect to the lower classes, and her behaviour to the maid and the villagers is intended to be supportive and careful. However, in going too far with her intention to help Eunice, she uncovers the maid’s secret and puts her whole family in a difficult situation where they have to dismiss the maid, thus leading her to kill them. Eunice also teaches several lessons to the reader, and she does so at different levels, including pieces of advice one would probably not recommend. The main information to withdraw from Eunice’s experience is that one can get away with murder, as long as one does not push one’s luck too far. She killed her father and blackmailed quite a number of people before moving into Lowfield Hall, but she was never prosecuted for these crimes. However, when she tries to apply this strategy to people that are cleverer than her, she loses the game and is arrested. This lesson is immoral but it remains something that the reader extracts from

Eunice's experience. She also demonstrates other skills she developed, such as how to avoid reading when one is illiterate or how to use other people to achieve one's goals (she pairs up with Joan and they kill the Coverdales together, for killing the four of them at the same time on her own would have proved difficult).

It is interesting to note that the didactic character teaching socially acceptable lessons is killed, whereas the one teaching controversial ones gets very close to getting away with her deeds. The morality in *A Judgement in Stone* is questioned, but the ending re-establishes a kind of balance in justice. In *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol uses the characters in a very similar way to that of Rendell, apart from the fact that he does not depict the maid's arrest by the police. She is shown going away from the house where the murder has been perpetrated and making her way through the policemen but the viewer will never know whether they will figure out what happened quickly enough to catch her or not. She might even surrender to them (which, however, is not very likely). As a matter of fact, Chabrol goes even further than Rendell in the disruption of morality in this film, since the crime remains visually and diegetically unpunished as regards the maid (it appears likely that the postmistress is killed in a car accident as she is leaving the crime scene).

The Bridesmaid has the peculiarity to have one character that is round but not didactic, and another that is didactic although flat. This pattern is rather unusual since round characters are usually the ones whose experience is useful to the reader (which is what gives them too much importance to be described roughly). However, we have here a character that

is very mysterious but teaches nothing and one that seems very straightforward and secondary but whose experience can serve the reader. Throughout the novel, Senta is shrouded in mystery; the reader wonders: Who is she? Is she lying? Is she crazy? Is she in love? Where is she when impossible to find? All these questions are the ones Philip asks himself and suggests to the reader. However, at the end of the book, the narration uncovers that Senta was in fact a straightforward character, who probably never lied and did not conceal many facts from Philip. Her character does not bring a message to the reader. As opposed to Senta, Cheryl, who is depicted in a rather simplistic way, shows the reader that selfish acts may have implications for people who are not related directly to oneself. When Cheryl is caught by the police for theft, they drive her back home and link her brother Philip to Senta, who is then arrested for murder. The notion of implications going out of hand can also be applied to Philip: when he drives past what he mistakenly assumes is Arnham's house showing it to Senta and tells her his story (p.118), he gives her the opportunity to kill the owner of the house to please him. Yet, the victim is not Arnham and is completely unrelated to the characters. This event shows that, even if Philip mentioned Arnham's betrayal to Senta without implying anything, the consequences of his acts got out of hand because Senta is not the person he thought and she goes straight into extremes.

The protagonist most representative of the flat characters category is Darren/Jacky. He is Fiona's/Sophie (Philip's older sister)'s husband and Senta's cousin. Both in the novel and in the film, this character is described

very precisely in a non-flattering way, leaving no space for mystery. In the novel first, the main description Philip (as focaliser) gives of his brother-in-law is far from laudatory:

Darren, being [Senta's] cousin, must be a far more interesting and clever person than he remembered. He must have been wrong about Darren...But now that he was in the company of his new brother-in-law, he realised he hadn't been mistaken (p.124)

This is followed by the physical description of the man and his behaviour in an even more derogatory tone ("fat", "guffawing at some television series", "talkative", "expansive"). It is also interesting to note that Darren is perfectly unable to retain any kind of information: when Philip asks him about Senta, the young man gives him all the information he has (in a confused manner since he himself cannot understand all the implications of his family links with Senta). It never occurs to him that it might be confidential. This character is completely transparent, there is nothing to wonder about him and, even when studied in depth, he shows no deeper level than his – rather representative – cue "Come on now, Phil, do you fancy her?". In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Darren's equivalent is Jacky, whose name is the French for "chav" in some areas. The viewer would not draw a favourable portrait of Jacky after the breakfast sequence in which he describes his cousin (in a confused way, as he does in the book): his looks are cheap and old-fashioned, his manners of speech sound a little limited and he eats whilst speaking, making unbearable munching noises. After having giggled when his wife told him he had "tiré le bon numéro" (*tirer* being a colloquial equivalent for

“having sexual intercourse” in French), Jacky holds his “petit mouton” and rubs against her leg, as a dog would. To add to the flatness of the character and make him even less interesting, Chabrol films other characters whilst he is speaking, as if there were nothing interesting about him at all, apart from what he is talking about (a voice-off story of Senta’s childhood). This character is flat both in the novel and the film. However, the tools used to show the disgust Philip feels for his brother-in-law are not the same, as the film adds physical assaults, disquieting noises and filmic devices (such as off-screen speech) to insist on the flatness (both in the literary and characteristic meanings of the word) of the character.

As opposed to her cousin, Senta is what Genette calls a round character: the description of her is elliptical, rather imprecise and it spreads across the whole novel. The reader struggles to understand who Senta really is and, even at the end of the novel, cannot make a clear-cut judgement about her. Philip, as a focaliser, does not really help the reader in so far as he himself is unable to decide on his feelings for Senta. The most confusing episode is when he arrives in Senta’s neighbourhood at night and sees a woman coming to him: “For an awful moment he had thought it was some unappetising prostitute soliciting him” (p.139). This woman is in fact Senta, who has never been evoked in such degrading terms before and never will be again. But Senta’s most confusing feature is her physical resemblance to the statue Philip’s family owns, named Flora. Flora itself is a source of interest since it is always referred to as “she”: “He crossed the lawn to where she was. Close to, the fallen may blossoms on her shoulders and the crown of her head

gave her a neglected look [...] In front of her, he observed [...] the remoteness of her gaze, the way her eyes seemed to stare past those who looked at her" (p.75). The statue is also given all possible human features: "marble skin", "human too", "She was Senta to the life" (p.129). By contrast, the description of Senta throughout the story is filled with allusions to stone, dehumanising her: "body marble-white" (p.99), "the coldness of marble" (p.100), "statuelike" (pp.161, 202), "stony" (p.163), "stone girl" (p.264), "stone flesh" (p.314),... Throughout the novel, these two "women" are linked, Philip kissing both of them equally, feeling the same for each of them. The way Chabrol renders this closeness between the two characters is also through the behaviour Philippe adopts with them but Chabrol even includes the statue in the couple's life, as Philippe gives it to Senta as a wedding gift after his proposal. The major allusion the film makes to this closeness between Senta and Flora is to be found in the very last shot of the film, in which the statue slowly fades in between Philippe and Senta, who is about to be arrested for her crimes (see Figure 5). It is also to be noted that Senta and Flora appear here as Siamese twins, linked by their heads, which is obviously where the resemblance lay. Besides, Philippe seems to be kissing Flora (and not Senta), which leads the reader to think that the statue has overthrown the woman in their competition for Philippe, who was always in love with the statue and only had feelings for Senta because she reminded him of the marble-girl. It is also interesting to note that the last shot of the film shows the characters still, as if they had turned into statues themselves. However, as Senta is to be arrested, the statue takes the leading role in the film: it is shown close to Philippe as the

one woman that will stay with him. Chabrol goes further than the novel, which does not explicitly refer to this victory of the statue over the woman.



Figure 5: The deadly love triangle

As regards characterisation, Chabrol chooses to keep close to Rendell's design. However, he uses visual techniques as an expansion to the explanations of Rendell's narrators. He also highlights the didactic characters' parts in order to make the message more obvious to the viewer.

4. Literature into Film: different tools towards a similar result

Stam states that "a filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium".¹⁵ It is true that cinema and literature produce different works with different tools. The main formal difference between a film and a novel is the former's ability to show what the book can only describe through verbal communication. It is interesting to note that different theorists have used this argument in different ways, proving the

¹⁵ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.17.

importance of this issue and the need to comment upon it. Quinn defends this point by saying that

In prose, language creates the space between the stated and the implied. This demonstrates the power of language. Film, on the other hand, is handicapped from its form of expression by its lack of semiotics, in the necessity to signify things specifically.¹⁶

Stam, on his part, has used the very same feature of cinema and interpreted it in the opposite way: "The performative and diegetic space of any visual medium complicates verbal narrative structure".¹⁷ However, these two interpretations are not completely opposed to each other, since one may argue that both media are incomplete (literature lacks visual aid and film lacks features available only to literary narration) and that the intertextuality that exists in the filmic adaptation of a novel should not be "seen as a Darwinian struggle to the death [but as] a dialogue offering mutual benefit and cross-fertilisation".¹⁸

Nevertheless, the reception with which cinema is usually met often leads directors, and even more so adapters, to make films with multiple levels of analysis in order to compete with literature because "unlike film, literature is channelled on a higher, more cerebral, transensual and out-of-body plane.

¹⁶ Maureen Quinn, *The Adaptation of a Literary Text to Film* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p.100.

¹⁷ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.318.

¹⁸ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.3.

[And some argue that] it takes no brains to sit down and watch a film”.¹⁹ This is what leads Chabrol to create such films, based on different levels on interpretation and intertextuality, as shall be studied in the next chapter.

It has been proved that a director “translating” (in Stam’s words) a novel into a film has to face medium-specific formal constraints that will have crucial influence on the outcome of the work. Narrative aspects are very different when it comes to cinema, and the adapter has to solve many questions and issues, and therefore to make choices that will have consequences on the plot itself, which forms the next focus of my study.

B. Diegetic amendments

It is interesting to note that, once the medium-specific modifications have been listed, a number of amendments still remain in the adaptation. They more specifically tend to concern diegetic events and they are the ones with which the audience seems to have most difficulties. Stam states that:

A faithful film is seen as uncreative, but an unfaithful film is a shameful betrayal of the original. An adaptation that updates the text for the present is upbraided for not respecting the period of the source [...] The adapter, it seems, can never win.²⁰

¹⁹ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.6-7.

²⁰ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.8.

In this chapter, I will analyse the main changes in the diegetic unfolding of the events and I will also focus on the treatment of the diegetic time in both the novels and the films. I will close this chapter with a consideration of the rooting of these works in the spatial and temporal settings.

1. Amendments in the events

“L’histoire et la diégèse concernent donc la partie du récit non-filmique. Elles sont ce que le synopsis, le scénario, le film ont de commun : un contenu, indépendant du médium qui le prend en charge”.²¹ This definition of the diegesis in the film does not apply to adaptations since it completely ignores the fact that, when a director adapts a novel, a selection in the events has to be made. As Laurent Jullier writes, “on ne peut pas tout raconter [...] Il faut sélectionner. La patte d’un cinéaste peut parfois s’exprimer dans le seul choix qu’il fait dans les péripéties qu’il entend représenter”.²² Chabrol has to reduce the story to create a film that will not last too long in order to fit with the mainstream film industry, and in order to produce a plot that the audience can follow. As opposed to literature, cinema in its first form (i.e. theatrical projection) does not allow the viewer to navigate between different parts of the diegesis in order to view again a part that was unclear; therefore, the director must eliminate and rearrange events, aiming for clarity.

Genette divides diegetic events into two categories: the catalysts and the kernels. Kernels are diegetic turning points that play a major part in

²¹ Anne Goliot-Lété et Francis Vanoye, *Précis d’Analyse Filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p.31.

²² Laurent Jullier, *L’analyse de Séquences, 2è Edition* (Paris, Armand Collin, 2007), p.46.

the whole of the story, whereas catalysts are of minor importance, usually leading from one kernel to another. As Stam points out, “the issue becomes one of comparative narratology, which asks questions such as the following. What events from the novel’s story have been eliminated, added or changed in the adaptation, and, more important, why?”²³

a) Catalysts

Catalysts are events that do not play a major part in the unfolding of the main plot. They are usually a link between two more important diegetic moves that are more relevant to the whole of the plot. As catalysts do not lead to major implications in the main plot, they are the easiest events for the director aiming at clarity to remove (as Stam wrote: “some of the novel’s material ha[s] to be eliminated to narrow the film’s scope”²⁴). However, catalysts may also be added in order to help the viewer understand the plot or simply to make it more realistic.

For instance, it is interesting to note that the theme of the incestuous love felt by Giles for his sister Melinda, which is often hinted at in *A Judgement in Stone* (“He would have liked to please her. She was the only person in the world he cared much about pleasing”, p.50), is completely removed in the film. In the novel, it is used as a hint to the fact that the characters are doomed, the pattern of incest being a common device in tragedy. As it has no direct implication for the main plot, Chabrol chooses to

²³ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.34.

²⁴ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.282.

remove it completely in order to focus on one immoral fact: the murder. However, the importance of this theme in the novel is not only diegetic but also referential, since it hints at the incestuous love felt for each other by the Papin sisters (who killed their mistresses in the 1930s, and whose story probably inspired the novelist as shown in I.B.3.b) below). It is also to be noted that Chabrol decided to deal with incestuous love in a few films, including his fiftieth *La Fleur du Mal* (2003), which was released a few years only after *La Cérémonie*. A few hints towards this theme are visible in *La Cérémonie* but the concept is never revealed and can easily remain unnoticed by a viewer who has never read the original novel. In this respect, *La Cérémonie* opens the way for Chabrol to deal with the theme in depth in *La Fleur du Mal*.

Another change the story undergoes concerns the personal life of Joan. In the novel, the character is married to a man and is a religious zealot. As regards Joan's religious obsession, Chabrol chooses a median solution: he does not completely remove it, but does not make it clear either. In the film, Jeanne works at the charity "Secours Catholique" and allows herself a few religious words now and again ("Ils te laissent même pas le jour du Seigneur") but she does not behave like a fanatic, unlike her literary equal. In his film, Chabrol gets rid of the character of the husband who only had a very limited part in the plot. Norman Smith is not the only character who does not feature in the film: Chabrol cuts the number of characters in the book down to the four victims and their two murderers, leaving aside the other children of the family, the villagers and the second maid the family hired. As stated by

Goliot-Lété, “le spectateur de cinéma n’est pas un lecteur de roman: ses repères visuels doivent être tels que l’espace et le temps du récit filmique demeurent clairs, homogènes, et s’enchaînent logiquement”.²⁵ Furthermore, Chabrol applies the same strategy to the adaptation of *The Bridesmaid*. The characters of Gérard Courtois and Christine Tardieu do not start a relationship with someone else once they have broken up. This catalyst in the novel brings Philip’s mother to a happier ending since she has recovered from the loss of her first husband and her separation with Courtois’s literary equivalent, but it has no impact on Senta’s fate (which is the main focus of the plot). Moreover, in the film, the name Stéphanie is no longer that of one of the bridesmaids (as in the book) but simply the real name Senta was given at birth. This amendment is very interesting: by removing a secondary character from the plot, Chabrol makes it more realistic, since Senta is not a real name and the viewer could more easily accept it as a chosen pseudonym. This point shall be studied in I.B.3 below, dealing with the spatial and temporal rooting of the works.

b) Kernels

Catalysts may be the easiest events to remove or amend in the transposition of a diegesis from a novel into a film, but kernels sometimes have to undergo changes as well. A kernel is a diegetic move that plays a major part into the unfolding of the main storyline. As Stam writes “while a novelist’s choices are relatively unconstrained by considerations of budget [...], films are from the outset immersed in technology and commerce.[...] A

²⁵ Anne Goliot-Lété and Francis Vanoye, *Précis d’analyse filmique* (Paris, Nathan, 1992), p.19.

filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium".²⁶ Chabrol, therefore, has to modify more substantial parts of the diegesis in order to deal with the constraints imposed on him. Both adaptations examined in this study show one kernel removed in the passage from novel to film, apart from the beginnings and endings of the stories which will form the focus of a separate part (see I.B.1.c) below).

In *A Judgement in Stone*, the narrator focuses on the characters' thoughts, pasts, feelings and projects. Eunice, herself, is described in detail, and her previous deeds are also told by the narrator. In the film, however, these details are completely omitted from the storyline. The only information the viewer has about Sophie's past is about her former employer (information even dismissed as fake by the narrator in the book). Chabrol's elimination of these details about the maid may be explained by his desire to make the massacre of the Lelièvres the climax of his film. The removal of the maid's past makes the story begin with her arrival in the family, and end when she leaves the house after having killed them (point to be studied in I.B.1.c) below).

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, several kernels were removed, resulting in a reshaping of the unfolding of the plot in order to lead to the same conclusion. The most obvious omission has to do with Philippe's younger sister (Patricia)'s addiction to gambling. In the novel, the character of Cheryl is stealing money from her family to satisfy her need for gambling, in order to

²⁶ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.16.

feel closer to her late father who also had this flaw ("Cheryl, who had been closer to her father than any of his children, hadn't, even now, begun the process of recovering from his death", p.28). This feature of the character is to play a major role, since when the police arrest Cheryl for thieving, they find out about Senta's crime through Philip. Having released *Rien ne va plus* (which already dealt with gambling) a few years before (1997), Chabrol may have thought it best to remove this somewhat peripheral theme from his adaptation. Indeed, the need for clarity in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* as a film, led Chabrol to remove gambling from his adaptation. However, Chabrol does hint at this theme in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* in order to prove to the viewer who previously read the book that he, as a reader, has understood the importance of this theme in the novel. This hint is an extract from a TV game shown on the Tardieus' screen, and the comments made by Patricia (whose literary equivalent is the gambler) also show that easy money is not a moral issue for her. Although Chabrol first appears to have removed gambling, he keeps the theme of theft and uses it as his way of leading the police to Senta through Philippe, therefore avoiding to amend Rendell's ending in a major way.

c) Diegetic changes in the beginning and the endings of the stories

In his writings and interviews, Chabrol constantly justifies his choices in film strategies and he gives clues to why he adapts such or such event in a specific way. Chabrol's films include a very high number of adaptations, from subtle hints to transpositions from text to screen. He says that he sometimes bases a whole film on a notion a book put in his mind and

finally comes up with a film very different to the novel. In such cases, he does not buy the copyrights of the book, for his works are not really related to the novel: “Cela dit, il peut vous arriver d’être inspiré uniquement par une idée contenue dans un livre, et si ce n’est qu’une idée, vous ne vous sentez pas obligé d’acquérir les droits”.²⁷ This strategy of amendment towards adaptation leads Chabrol to modify the ending and the beginning of the novels in order to alter the impact his films have on their audience.

As stated earlier, the beginning of *La Cérémonie* omits bits of the maid’s previous life, the opening scene showing her arrival at the café where her interview with Mme Lelièvre is set. The novel, however, includes a whole description of the maid’s everyday life and her past deeds, as well as an explanation of the bourgeois family’s way of life without a housemaid. Chabrol transposes this information in different ways. Sophie evokes her past with her friend Jeanne, confesses her deeds and lets the viewer know that she has already escaped troubles.

The most interesting amendment Chabrol makes from *A Judgement in Stone* to *La Cérémonie* is that of the ending of the diegesis. In the film, once the family has been killed, the killers leave the house. Jeanne has a serious, possibly fatal, car accident whilst leaving the yard and Sophie is shown walking away for a while. Guy Austin seems to think that Sophie manages to escape from the police who have arrived on the accident scene and do not know about the murder yet (Austin writes about “Sophie’s escape

²⁷ Claude Chabrol et François Guérif, *Comment faire un Film* (Paris, Payot et Rivages, 2004), p.24.

from the crime scene"²⁸). I differ on this point and, based on what Chabrol has himself said, tend to think that the film deliberately conceals the outcome for Sophie: "J'arrête toujours le film avant la scène finale. J'ai toujours préféré que la boucle de l'histoire ne se ferme pas complètement".²⁹ However, Austin's point is clearly based on Chabrol's subsequent explanation that "il y a souvent deux lectures apparemment possibles, mais qui n'en font qu'une ou dont une seule est valable [...] La seconde vient de la volonté du spectateur".³⁰ In this case, social order requires for Sophie to be arrested for her crime and most viewers (as society members) imagine and hope for such an ending. Yet, as no visual or audio evidence of such an arrest is given, her escape remains a possibility. Intertextuality can give a valuable clue since the novel does not end with the crime itself, but with the maid's trial and the postmistress lying in a vegetative coma. Therefore, a viewer who has read the book will assume that the killer will be arrested. The novel also features an investigation of the crime led by a detective in the house, in which the maid is allowed to stay up to the moment when he realises that she did murder the family. Here, again, Chabrol's comments on another adaptation (*A Double Tour*, 1959) sheds a new light on why he decided to remove this part of the story: "L'enquête policière ne m'intéressait pas, je l'ai donc supprimée, le flic n'était pas passionnant, je l'ai fait sauter et j'ai gardé ce qui me plaisait".³¹

²⁸ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.164.

²⁹ Joël Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1987), p.204.

³⁰ Joël Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1987), p.204.

³¹ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Cherche-Midi, 2002), p.96.

This amendment also plays an important part in the treatment of diegetic time in this film, which I shall deal with in I.B.2 below.

Both the beginning and the ending of *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* are very similar to those of the novel it is based on. However, it is interesting to note that if Chabrol does not amend the ending of the novel, it is because Rendell decided to end it in a very "Chabrolian" way, by putting an end to the diegesis before the characters have come to a tangible outcome. Whilst *The Bridesmaid* ends with "When he stole the statue, he had thought, they wouldn't send a police car out for something like that. But they would for this. They would for this..." (p.441), the film's ending shows all this in a few shots. The policemen are shown arriving at Senta's while the lovers are lying on the bed, Philip very pensive and Senta completely incapable of gaining the slightest grasp of the situation. The statue Philippe stole slowly fades in the shot and the credits begin. Senta is not shown being arrested in either the book or the film, but the fact that the characters are trapped in Senta's basement leads the audience to understand that there is no way out for her, especially considering the fact that she is not even aware that she has done something wrong and that the police are about to fetch her, thanks to Philip who gave her away.

Chabrol's endings are always half open since, as he says, there is only one possible ending, the other options being fantasised by his audience. He seems to respect this rule even when he adapts a novel, even though it may imply omissions from or changes to the original novel. In the case of *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol ends the film earlier than Rendell did in the novel, which

adds openness and moral uneasiness to the ending. *The Bridesmaid* ends in a “Chabrolian” way in that the outcome is strongly suggested but never shown.

2. Treatment of diegetic time

The change of medium between literature and film leads to changes in the way time is dealt with. According to Genette’s classification, diegetic time has to be studied through three filters: order, frequency and duration. Whilst the former two are adapted by Chabrol without major changes, the latter is much more interesting.

Both novels are written in a way that is deeply rooted in time. Most of the time, the reader knows what time of the day it is, what month, what happened before and how long ago, etc. More precisely, in *A Judgement in Stone*, the narrator even uses a type of countdown from the day Eunice enters the Coverdales’ lives till the day she murders them. The narrator also mentions the birthdays, the seasons, the characters’ age, etc. This very precise treatment of time is uncomfortable for the reader, who has already been told in the very first lines that “Four members of this family, George, Jacqueline and Melinda Coverdale and Giles Mont, died in the space of fifteen minutes on 14 February, St-Valentine’s Day [...] Two weeks later, Eunice was arrested for the crime” (p.2). This prolepsis tells the reader that the time of the family’s death is getting closer and closer every time the narrator refers to time passing by (“winter had stripped bare the woods” (p.99); “6 January, Epiphany” (p.121); “[Melinda] would go home for the 13th[of February], for that was George’s birthday” (p.133)). The climax of the diegetic time is the

massacre, and all the markers of time seem to point towards it. However, the remainder of the novel maintains temporal markers but these markers now point backwards to the time of the killing, following the temporal progress of all police investigations. The few chapters of the book that come after the murder aim to describe the evening when the family were killed, and the diegetic time of a fortnight is of little importance as regards the “difficulty of fitting the facts to the times [that is] to cause [the detective] much frustration”, (p.171). Chabrol also places the murder as the climax of his diegesis, but he decides to completely remove the investigation of the murder. The film leads to the killing of the family which occurs unexpectedly; making it the last diegetic move gives it an importance in the viewer’s mind. The quickness of its unfolding and the fact that, unlike the book, the film does not insist on it make the murder more shocking and vivid in the viewer’s mind.

It is very hard to define when the action is set, how long it lasts for and when the ellipses are in both films of this study. For instance, *La Demoiselle d’Honneur* seems to be a collection of random days and nights, the viewer is never really told if the night he sees follows the previous one shown or if an ellipsis has occurred. The viewer may also lose track of day or night when the action is at Senta’s, since the absence of proper windows makes it more difficult to define time. It is also interesting to note that before meeting Senta, the only places Philippe is seen at are his workplace or home; after he has met her, he seems to spend most of his time with her, hardly balancing the rest of his time between work and family. *La Cérémonie* is also very unclear about the duration of the events. The viewer can see the family

going on holiday at some point, Melinda's birthday later on but the whole of the plot could take place over years or over just a few weeks, no real clue helps to define it. The only moment of the film when the anchoring in time is very specific is the playback of the tape that was recording when the murder occurred. Melinda, who was trying to record on tape the opera broadcast on television, has also recorded the murder and the police play this tape back when they find the tape recorder in Jeanne's car (she stole it from the crime scene just before her car accident). The viewer knows exactly what is going to be said next, who is going to be shot and how long the tape is going to last, since he/she has just seen the killing unfold and still has a vivid memory of this crime.

Chabrol's dealing with time is very specific to his way of shooting films: he only uses temporal markers when the effect produced is important and leaves most of the events in a temporal blur. He does not hesitate to amend the source-novel in order to keep within the boundaries of this strategy. The fact that the murder in *La Cérémonie*, is the only event so clearly inscribed in temporal settings makes it stand out from the rest of the events, in both its significance and its technical features.

3. Diegetic rooting in spatial and historical setting

Rendell and Chabrol both set the action of their diegesis in their own period and country. This is one of the main features to be analysed in their works. Stam claims that "adaptations are inevitably inscribed in national

settings”,³² which leads to the question of the transposition from one country to another (namely from England where Rendell sets her stories, to France, where Chabrol shoots his films).

a) Transposition of the characters' names

In *A Judgement in Stone*, the family's name is Coverdale. This name includes the word “cover” which implies the notion of concealment. The family wants to hide something by covering it. Another hint towards this secrecy is that of the business they run: a tin factory. The family live as if they were in a tin themselves, they rarely let anyone into the house, have no apparent friends in the diegesis and the only people they let in are those who work for them. Chabrol adapts the family's name to a more French sounding one: Lelièvre. Here too, the notion of living apart from the rest of society appears, since “lièvre” means “hare” and a hare hides in a burrow, in which it is safe. Moreover, this surname is undoubtedly related to the *fait-divers* that inspired Rendell and Chabrol: that of the murder of the bourgeois Lancelin family by their maids in France in 1933, also known as the Papin sisters case. The link between the *fait-divers* and the surname is that, not only did the Papin sisters murder their mistresses, but they also took their eyes out, tied them and stabbed them, in the very same way a cook would prepare a hare. Finally, the link between the *fait-divers* and the name chosen by Chabrol is the fact that the names of the victims start with the same letter: Lelièvre/Lancelin (see I.B.3.b) below).

³² Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.44.

The maid in the novel is Eunice Parchman, who becomes Sophie Bonhomme in the film. Both Rendell and Chabrol choose names with obvious positive connotations for this character. In Greek, Eunice means “good victory” and Sophie means “wisdom”, whilst Bonhomme literally means “good man” in French. Greek is chosen here since it is a language spoken by the learned. All these clues seem to be deceptive since the maid is not very learned, indeed she is illiterate, and kills four people, so the positive connotations of her name do not seem to apply very well to her. However, what the authors want to show is that the maid was a good character, but that the various frustrations she goes through lead her to perpetrate condemnable deeds. Moreover, when the maid is evoked in front of the family for the first time in the film, Georges cannot repress the literary reference her name calls for: “Malheur...” (in reference to Comtesse de Ségur’s *Les Malheurs de Sophie*).

From *The Bridesmaid* to *La Demoiselle d’Honneur*, the surnames have also been through some modifications, but they were most of all “frenchified”. Chabrol makes a point in making his film plausible to his audience and this transformation of the names is part of his attempt.

Senta is not a common name, be it in France or in the United-Kingdom, and it sounds very poetic but not a very likely name to give a baby. Still, Chabrol decides to keep it for its poetic value and its unusualness. This highly uncanny name makes Senta stand out from the crowd, she is different and she claims to be so (“toi et moi on est différents”). However, this name is only a pseudonym for the character in the film, whose Christian name is in

fact Stéphanie (a name used in the book for the second bridesmaid, whose part in the film is so limited that she does not even say a single line). The fact that Senta does not use the name she was given at birth also shows the character's schizophrenic behaviour: Senta lies throughout the story and pretends she cannot see or understand some obvious events simply because they are inconvenient to her. This schizophrenic behaviour is also made clear by her cousin's wife when she explains that Senta chooses a new name quite regularly, as if she were unable to stick to a single identity, a suspicion which is strengthened by her acting job.

As is usually the case in literature and cinema, characters' names bear a lot of significance in Rendell's novels and their adaptations by Chabrol. Onomastics help define a character's origins and attitudes, as part of an indirect characterisation process. Yet, this process is not infallible and, for instance, Sophie Bonhomme is neither wise, nor good so her characterisation needs to take other parameters into consideration.

b) The Papin sisters' case: France's goriest *fait-divers*

Although Chabrol claims not to have based his film on the Papin sisters' case³³, it cannot be denied that the plot of *La Cérémonie* has several connotations to this *fait-divers*. Besides, Rendell herself mentions it in *A Judgement in Stone* (which is the basis for Chabrol's film) and his script-writer, Caroline Eliachief, mentioned her interest in the case when she adapted the story.

³³ Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.102.

On 2 February 1933, the Papin maids brutally murdered their mistresses and then recoiled into their room, where they were fetched by the police on the next day. The Papin sisters and their masters, the Lancelins, had had very tense relations for a few years and it is on that evening that the maids let out the pressure, as violently and suddenly as they could. This savage murder was the result of an evident lack of communication in the household between mentally fragile domestics and their bourgeois masters: “d’un groupe à l’autre, on ne se parlait pas. Ce silence pourtant ne pouvait être vide, même s’il était obscure aux yeux de ses acteurs.”³⁴

The lack of communication between the two parts was also due to another crucial factor which is the maids’ lack of grasp of any cultural knowledge (as house domestics, their education was very poor), which was a gap that could not be reconciled with their masters. This is also true about Sophie in *La Cérémonie*: being illiterate is for her the source of an incommensurable gap between her and her masters, but also with society in its whole.

Edwards states that “to have inadequate access to language means to be powerless”³⁵ and it is indeed easy to see that it was neither in Sophie’s nor in the Papins’ power to get closer to their masters. This does not mean, though, that the masters were responsible for their own fate (at least not consciously) since they were willing to work towards some

³⁴ Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.33.

³⁵ Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.92.

communication. The Lancelins accepted to employ the second Papin sister to reunite them, the Lelièvres help Sophie with what they think is only sight troubles.

For that matter, the line between fiction and reality is very blurred and many parallels can be drawn between the actual *fait-divers* and the fictitious novel and film, both at the everyday environment's level (there were "brown walls in the maids' room"³⁶ which certainly overwhelmed a sense of confinement) or at the more political and social level (see III.C.2.b) below).

Besides, the Papin sisters' case is still very present in French culture today and, although the level of interest in it is far from the media frenzy reached in the 1930s, documentaries, books and films still flourish on these fascinating facts. The incestuous love between the sisters, the political facet of the crime, the violence used and so many other elements, make this case an inexhaustible source of interest due to all its features. By putting all these elements on screen – with different levels of explicitness and accuracy – Chabrol's film is also a multi-layered source of interest.

c) The use of television as historical anchoring

Television always plays a major role in Chabrol's films. This medium fascinates him and its use in his films is manifold. However, in order to use it properly, the first thing Chabrol has to do is update the use of television and the features it has in the novels so that it matches that of the film.

³⁶ Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.76.

In *A Judgement in Stone*, the family purchases a colour TV set and lends their outdated black-and-white set to the maid. Chabrol retains this “patronising” (as Melinda puts it) gift but updates it from an analogue TV set to a satellite one for the family because at the time of screening, in the 1990s, black-and-white TV sets were very rare and had long been overthrown by colour sets, so a bourgeois family would not own one. As in every film by Chabrol, what is shown on the TV screen is of major importance. For instance, what is shown on the Lelièvres’ new TV set are extracts of two films: a foreign film showing a character poisoning another (the spectator hears the person dying as sound-off) and an ominous extract from Chabrol’s *Les Noces Rouges* (1973), which shows passionate embraces of an illegitimate couple who kill their spouses in order to live together. Chabrol uses this self-reference to tell the spectator (provided the spectator knows Chabrol’s works well enough) that he is going to show a murder again. Guy Austin interprets this intratextual reference as a sign of Chabrol’s belonging to the *genre* of “auteurist directors”, meaning that Chabrol’s oeuvre has literary depth and needs to be studied as a whole and each film had to be considered in comparison with all or parts of his works.³⁷

Moreover, Sophie spends all her free time watching TV and is completely captivated by this medium. The programmes she watches on TV are highly representative of her own psychology: children’s programmes, including one about dictionaries that have been made more attractive to children, which is ironic since she, as an illiterate adult, could never use a

³⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.167.

dictionary. The very first thing she sees on TV has to do with justice – “Nul ne peut être juste s’il n’est humain” – as opposed to the novel in which the maid sees a murder as a first sequence on her TV. This might be considered as a hint to the ending of the book that deals with the investigation and trial of the killer, with which Chabrol dispenses (see I.B.1.c) above). From the moment she is denied the right to watch television, when Georges turns the TV set off whilst she is watching because he wants her attention in order to dismiss her, a shift in her behaviour can be felt. Firstly, she turns the TV set back on, proving she can act against the will of her master, and then she gradually becomes more transgressive, up to the point when even the law cannot contain her aggressiveness and she murders the Lelièvres.

The first appearance of a TV set in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* shows breaking news of a missing girl (Raphaëlle Pélissier) last seen on her way to her boyfriend's, who had telephoned her just before she left. In the next to last scene, Senta confesses she faked this man's voice in order to kill Raphaëlle, whom she held responsible for the man's decision to leave her a few months previously. As in *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol shows on television a sequence that is highly proleptic. The excerpt of *Les Noces Rouges* (1973) that is shown in *La Cérémonie* hints at the fact that death is looming over the Lelièvres. The news report on Raphaëlle Pélissier shown in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* introduces the notion of crime and of acting (the murderer having put on a false voice to attract her victim) in a very subtle way. The only other sequence shown on TV is an extract from a famous French TV game (“Tac-o-tac”), and, although one cannot really see a proper prolepsis since no part of

the film shows anything about gambling, it refers to the character of Cheryl in Rendell's novel. Philippe's young sister has a gambling problem in the novel and this needed to be removed from the adaptation (see I.B.1.b) above). Chabrol therefore includes this topic very subtly so as to maintain Rendell's theme, although including it explicitly in the adaptation would have been problematic (see I.B.1.b) above). Finally, the viewer can not help but notice that Senta does not own a TV set. Apart from the fact that this is highly unusual in a French home in the twenty-first century, it is even more intriguing in the house of an actress. Indeed, Senta claims to be an "actor" and to have played with John Malkovich which tends to prove she does not only work in a theatre company but also appears in films. However, Philippe says he has never seen her on TV and she does not own a TV set to watch her performances. Moreover, the fact that she lives in a basement with very small windows makes the place look like an animal's den. Senta is linked to animality in that she lacks moral sense, she lives a secluded life and hardly interacts with others, and she seems to be unable to relate to the arts, which are seen, by some philosophical trends, to be the major difference between human beings and animals. For instance, Montaigne does not deprive animals of the capability of art but he insists on the fact that their art is not an art in the sense humans would define it:

Chaque avantage supposé propre à l'homme (le discours, le raisonnement, l'art, l'apprentissage, l'enseignement, la moralité, la beauté...) est démontré commun à l'homme et à l'animal [...] ainsi, la parole naturelle est elle plus efficace

que la parole instituée, l'art des animaux plus sur et moins
sujet à erreur que l'art humain.³⁸

This definition applies perfectly to Senta whose “art” is that of killing: she murders people with the beautifully shaped Venetian dagger and artistically drags her victims into her trap. If Senta acts artfully, it has to be said that it is unwilling and that, although art can be seen in what she does, she is incapable of interpreting it and, *a fortiori* to create it.

The part played by television in Rendell's *The Bridesmaid* is inexistent but Chabrol still includes it in his film, as it is a major feature of the whole of his works.

d) The use of the telephone as historical anchoring

Both novels give a central part to the medium of communication that is the telephone. Not only is it featured in both novels, but it also plays a crucial part in the unfolding of the events. Therefore, Chabrol needs to feature it in his films as well. However, the telephone industry went through massive changes between the late 1970s and the twenty-first century, forcing Chabrol to update the uses the characters make of the telephone and the telephones themselves in order to remain consistent with the period in which he shot his film.

In *A Judgement in Stone* and *La Cérémonie*, the diegetic moves including a telephone are the same. The first of them involves the maid in

³⁸ Gontier, Thierry, *De l'homme à l'animal: Montaigne et Descartes ou les paradoxes de la philosophie moderne sur la nature des animaux*. (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1998), p.94.

another difficult position due to her illiteracy when her masters ask her to telephone a grocery list to the shop so that they can pick up the order on their way back from work. The maid's escape is to pretend the telephone line is dead and go to her friend Joan to ask her to do the chore. The second use of the telephone involves George and the maid. The master wants the maid to hand a crucial document to his driver that he has forgotten, whilst he is at work. The maid pretends again that the telephone does not work properly and hangs up. Then, Melinda telephones her boyfriend to tell him about her fear of being pregnant. The maid accidentally picks up the telephone and realises she could hear the conversation and blackmail the young girl. All these events are transposed very similarly from text to screen. However, Chabrol goes further than Rendell when he decides to insist on the breach in communication that Sophie plays with. The film shows the postmistress cutting the telephone wires in order to make sure she and Sophie will not be disturbed whilst killing the helpless family, who are thus unable to call for help.



Figure 6: The breach in communication

Although Chabrol adapts the use of the telephone very closely to what Rendell did in her novel in *La Cérémonie*, he does not do so in *The Bridesmaid*. The mobile telephone having made such a big intrusion in everyday life, he cannot but feature it in his film. Therefore, he adds a few telephone calls to the ones Rendell includes in her novel. It is important to note that in the novel, the telephone already plays a part in the plot since it highlights Philip's longing for Senta, either when he tries to call her and gets no answer, or when he hopes the caller is Senta whenever the telephone rings. In the film, Chabrol keeps the major part the telephone has in Rendell's plot and updates the use the characters make of it so as to match the more modern use made by the viewers themselves. The sequence that shows Philippe calling from the pavement in front of Senta's house when she refuses to answer the doorbell is one of these updates of the use of the telephone.

In *The Bridesmaid*, Chabrol denounces the telephone as a partial medium, in that it only offers part of the cognitive signals one uses to testify to someone's identity. Thus, Raphaëlle Pélissier, who goes missing at the beginning of the film, is tricked into going to meet her killer (Senta) thanks to a telephone call that she receives from someone she thinks is her boyfriend but is in fact Senta putting on a false voice. A parallel can hereby be made between this denunciation of the telephone as cognitively partial and the criticism of film adaptation as an alleged setting into stone of literary imagination. Chabrol seems to defend the idea that the shown is more powerful than the worded (represented here by the words pronounced on the telephone by an unknown caller).

Both the writer and the director choose to anchor their works in their period and place. Although their period and place are different and lead them to treat the temporal and national settings accordingly, the effect this choice produces is the same: the audience can identify with the characters by recognising the devices the latter use and the way in which they live and therefore feel part of the plot.

C. The rendering of the concept of “strong narration” in cinema

First and foremost, a definition of what I shall call strong narration has to be given as a prelude to this part of my study. The term “strong” was chosen so as to oppose the, nonetheless hard to define, term “neutral”. The notion of strong narration will include the features of a narrator who has unlimited knowledge of the characters and of the facts. However, and this is where the strong narrator can be differentiated from the typical omniscient one, he/she might keep some pieces of information to himself/herself and mislead the reader, either temporarily or indefinitely. Moreover, this type of narrator will also mislead the reader either by using prolepses or by distorting the diegetic time in favour of a confusion in the reader’s mind.

1. In what sense do these novels feature “strong narration”?

These novels feature heterodiegetic omniscient narrators whose levels of involvement in the story are different and can vary depending on the events studied. Both narrators know the feelings of the characters, their past

and give clues towards the unravelling of the mysteries that are central to the plots.

In *A Judgement in Stone*, for instance, the narrator gives very precise descriptions of the characters (“that was the way [Jacqueline] was: bath, hair, hands, nails, warmer dress, sheer tights, the new dark green shoes, face painted to look au naturel”, (p.12); “George Coverdale was an exceptionally handsome man, classic-featured, as trim of figure as when he had rowed for his university in 1939”, (p.13); “George and Jacqueline were discreet people”, (p.20); ...). The narrator also gives specific descriptions of the places: “There are six bedrooms in Lowfield Hall, a drawing-room, a dining room, a morning room, three bathrooms, a kitchen and what are known as usual offices. In this case, the usual offices were the back kitchen and the gun room”, (p.11). This sentence also shows another feature that helps define narration as strong in Rendell’s novels: the incessant transmission of proleptic hints by the narrator to the reader. The gun room, where no action is set in the whole book is mentioned quite regularly, which is a hint that the family will be shot by the guns they own. Another hint that is given as regards the tragic ending is the beginning of chapter 9, where the narrator makes a parallel between the maid and her friend and the Papin sisters. The Papin sisters, as explained in I.B.1.a) above, murdered their mistresses in a cruel way and, although the narrator differentiates the characters from the real maids in their relationship, he/she does not say that they have no common features at all.

In *The Bridesmaid*, it is interesting to note that the narrator does not give clues as the ones studied above. Part of the explanation is that the

novel is focalised through Philip's point of view (see I.A.2.a) above), and that Philip himself is already very confused by the situation he is in. He finds himself investigating Senta's life and lies and gets clues on this, which then lead the reader to draw the necessary conclusions. However, markers of strong narration can be found in *The Bridesmaid*, that were also used in *A Judgement in Stone*, namely the deliberate ellipses made by the narrator. The narrator indeed avoids telling parts of the diegeses at the moment when they occur and the reader only learns about these, and is able to contextualise them, at the end of the story, when the whole truth comes out as an analepsis. Two diegetic events belong to this trend in *The Bridesmaid*: the disappearances of Rebecca Neave and of the homeless man living on Senta's doorstep. The fact that Rebecca Neave has gone missing is reported on the news at the beginning of the novel. It is brought up by different characters all along the story, for they are concerned with the young woman's fate. The end of the novel shows that Senta killed Rebecca when they met. The narrator never hints at the fact that Senta might have played a part in the crime and conceals her responsibility up to the end of the novel. The opposite situation is dealt with the same way by the narrator as the homeless man living on Senta's doorstep disappears and Senta says he is the man that Philip claims to have killed. However, the reader knows that Philip only pretended that he killed someone using a random *fait-divers* from the newspaper, so even if this man were dead, Philip would not be the killer. Yet, Philip bumps into the homeless man and this event proves that he is not dead, something else that the narrator omitted to tell the reader earlier on.

These gaps in the plot make the reader doubtful about the narrator and unsure about the unfolding of the plot.

Finally, the level of implication of the narrator in the story-telling is very uneven. As stated above, the narrators of these novels are usually very noticeable. However, they sometimes completely withdraw from the storytelling process in favour of a very neutral heterodiegetic non-focalised narration. The event most representative of this withdrawal is that of the Coverdales' murder in *A Judgement in Stone*. Neither is the reader given access to the victims' feelings or sensations, nor are the murderers' motives explained to him/her. Adding to the flatness of this account is the fact that the focalising instance here is the narrator himself/herself. Although focalisation seems to be shifting between a few characters throughout the novel, it is here completely in the hands of the narrator, who only describes the facts, actions and visual features but does not enter the characters' psychology or feelings during this scene. It is as if the narrator were surrendering his/her omniscience at the most crucial moment, depriving the reader (now put in an external narrative place) of complete grasp of the situation.

In these two novels, the narrators belong to the type of "strong narrators": they are omniscient, they can be misleading (up to the point of pretending not to be omniscient), and they conceal or delay some information from the reader. How does Chabrol render these narrative features in his film adaptations?

2. “Strong narration” rendered with expressive film-making

As studied above in paragraph I.A.2.b) dealing with visual focalisation, Chabrol's way of filming is expressive and can give clues or add different levels to a sequence. The sequences studied above have ideological implications (the shots from *A Judgement in Stone* implying the overthrowing of the bourgeoisie by the lower class), and diegetic ones (the shots from *The Bridesmaid* showing Senta's power over the characters and introducing the attic as a key-room in the house).

Other examples of expressive shots can be studied in relationship to the strong narrative sources they have. For instance, the most difficult situation for the maid in *La Cérémonie* is that of the grocery list. Mrs Lelièvre has left a grocery list for Sophie to telephone through to the shop. However, the illiterate maid is in a very difficult position and needs to have this grocery list telephoned through so that her secret remains unknown to the family. As she is only able to read the telephone number but not the products' names, she tries to compare the names Catherine has written with the ones written on the boxes in the kitchen cupboards. Chabrol leaves his viewer in the same kind of ignorance by never filming the actual list. The viewer is therefore in exactly the same position as Sophie when she tries to decipher the writings on the boxes in the cupboards since neither knows whether or not she is on the right track. Chabrol uses the technique of a reverse angle in which Sophie faces the camera, and the viewer can only see the blank back side of the list. It is also important to notice that, here, Sophie is shown in the mirror, on which the camera slowly zooms. This is the moment when the viewer enters

the maid's world; the viewer is now to experience her way of life and the difficulties she has been through.

When Melinda announces her alleged pregnancy to her boyfriend on the telephone, she is beaming with a warm light that stands for life. However, this light fades away by itself and Melinda finds herself in the dark. Just before her death, Melinda will reveal that she is not pregnant and that she was mistaken when she said she was. This fading away of the light can be interpreted both as the fact that she does not bear life into her womb, and the fact that her own life is to disappear soon as well.

Although literature and cinema have to make use of different tools, they both have sufficient ones to play with their audience, occasioning twists in the plots and making the ending much less expectable. The second example given above is a clue towards the fact that Melinda is not pregnant. Although subtle, it give the viewer a little bit of information that is nor explicitly stated until the very last moments of the family ("L'heureux événement n'est pas pour demain," says Melinda whilst seated on her dad's lap).

Where Rendell used "strong narration" to explain future events anaphorically, Chabrol uses cinematic devices such as lights, camera angles and character's positioning.

3. The character of Flora: the seen outruns the read

In *The Bridesmaid*, Flora is the statue that the Wardmans own. It was given by late Mr Wardman to his wife on their honeymoon after he lost a bet (Mr Wardman would gamble on anything as shown in part I.B.1.b) above).

Philip has always had feelings for this statue, and the novel shows that once Mrs Wardman has given the statue to her new lover, Philip realises that what he feels for it is love. Besides, the statue's features are very similar to Senta's and this resemblance makes Philip even more confused about his feelings for each of them. Flora itself is a source of interest since it is always referred to as "she" (see I.A.3 above). These two "women" are always linked and there is always a parallel drawn between them. Philip even goes as far as to steal the statue from his mother's lover in order to keep it with him and kiss it when he cannot reach Senta.

In his film, Chabrol reuses all this material in the very same way as Rendell did. Moreover, thanks to visual techniques, Chabrol can also go further in the treatment of the character of Flore and of the parallel with Senta. For instance, the very first time Flore is introduced in the film is the only time she is going to be seen in public, as the family gathers around the statue and discusses the fact that Christine will give it to her new lover. The first time Senta is introduced is also the only time she is to be seen in public (at her cousin's wedding), and she is only seen in company of Philippe from then on. This wedding is also the very first time when the parallel between the young woman and the statue is made. Philippe cannot take his eyes off of the bridesmaid - whom he has never met before - and he tells his sister "Tu trouves pas qu'elle ressemble à Flore?", which is followed by a pan from his face to the pedestal on which the statue used to sit, before it was given away. This sequence also shows Senta very still, with a face showing no feeling and

standing apart from the crowd, in the very same way as a statue would be used as a *décor* in a wedding photograph.



Figure 7: Senta as a statue

The other addition Chabrol makes as regards Senta and Flore is that of the wedding gift. After Philippe has successfully proposed to Senta, he gives her the statue. It is very hard for him to let go of it but as he will soon be living with Senta, he knows he and Flore will not stay apart for too long. Once Senta has put the statue on a shelf, it seems to watch them and see to it that their relationship goes well. Introducing Flore in Senta's house is a way for Philippe to humanise Senta by introducing the arts into her burrow (see I.B.3.c) above). Slowly, a pan to the left leaves Flore out from the shot, as if the statue were no longer part of the picture in favour of Senta.



Figure 8: Flora looks after the couple



Figure 9: The pan leaves the statue out

Finally, as studied in I.A.3 above, Senta and Flore appear as Siamese twins in the very last shot of the film, when Senta is doomed to go to prison. The statue slowly fades in between the characters, its lips touching Philippe's. This final sequence reveals that Senta has, in fact, not won the

fight for Philippe; she is about to go to prison whereas Flore is to remain part of his life.



Figure 10: The deadly love triangle

Although strong narration in a novel necessarily requires a noticeable narrative instance, it can be rendered in film without the use of a narrative voice-off. Chabrol uses a whole set of visual techniques to render what Rendell expresses with words, and even has the opportunity to go further, with hints and subtle devices. After all, “the performative and diegetic space of any visual medium complicates verbal narrative structure”³⁹ and this is why a novel and its adaptation have to be studied together because “the value added in analysing film and literature combined, using for each its own methods, increases the value each one might have alone”.⁴⁰

³⁹ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.318.

⁴⁰ Maureen Quinn, *The Adaptation of a Literary Text to Film* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p.121.

II. Generic classification of the films:

After having closely studied the narrative features of the adaptations of the corpus in the previous chapter, it is important to be able to classify them in wider categories and see how they interact within the film industry. Any study of a film needs to have a look at its generic codification. I shall firstly give a summarising outlook of *genre* theory in order to ascertain that *genre* plays a key role in film production. Then, I will turn to three mainstream film *genres* and study how the two films in the corpus belong to or differ from these *genres*, with the aim of providing a wider classification of them.

A. Genre theory, an overview

Guy Austin states the importance of generic classification in Chabrol's works very early in his study of the director's oeuvre. He writes

[Chabrol's] concept of cinema privileges the spectator as well as the creator – hence the importance of *genre* in his work, since it is often via the expectations aroused by popular *genres* that a spectator approaches a given film [...] Chabrol chooses to work within the confines of established *genres*.¹

This assertion raises the question of what a *genre* is, how it can be defined and studied, and what sort of impact it has on a film's reception.

¹ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.4.

1. How to define a *genre*?

Genre theory has proved to be a very prolific field of study but no agreement seems to have been reached on how a *genre* can be defined. The main reason for this is that generic classification cannot rely on specific tangible elements but has to take into account various factors, including the narrative structure, the relationships between the characters, the visual devices used, the soundtrack and – in some cases – the reception by the audience itself. Raphaëlle Moine notes that

Le classement des films par *genre* suppose toujours de définir une étiquette générique abstraite, alors que les critères qui déterminent les autres ensembles de films possibles sont immédiatement donnés et repérables, parce qu'ils portent sur des éléments concrets, internes aux films ou avec lesquels les films se construisent.²

What Moine means by “autres ensembles de films possibles” is the classification by author, director, period of production or production company; criteria that may be used by cinema festivals or DVD shops, for instance. However, if one takes into account Moine's definition only, the whole process of *genrification* seems rather abstract and arbitrary. Rick Altman outlines a slightly more precise definition of a *genre*, although it is not a very clear-cut one: “The unity of a *genre* is generally attributed to consistent patterns in the cinematic content, iconography and narrative structure”.³ He then enumerates an extensive list of other theorists' views regarding criteria which should be

² Raphaëlle Moine, *Les Genres du Cinéma* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2005), p.13.

³ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.75.

taken into account in order to define a *genre*: most of the critics seem to think that genre belongs “in the texts themselves”. However, some critics stand out from this trend and classify *genre* upon other criteria: Colie thinks *genre* can be located “in the process of composition”; Neale argues that *genres* are “driven by audience expectations” and Rosmarin denounces *genre* as a mere “critical construct”.⁴ All these different views can be defended and the conclusion that Altman is drawn to make is that “the only reasonable alternative is to conclude that *genre* is not permanently located in any single place, but may depend at different times on different criteria”.⁵ If one tries to push further this hypothesis, the conclusion they shall draw is that the following features may have to be taken into account to generically label a film: location (of which stem foreign films, for instance); authorship (an example of which is women’s films); film features (the most analysed one being westerns); and institution (the most famous institutions being avant-garde and art cinema). This makes film *genre* a very versatile criterion which does not necessarily say much about a specific film: how useful to a viewer is it to know that a film is a foreign film when he/she goes to the cinema? Would it not be more appropriate for a viewer to know about the content or the visual trend of a film rather than the country it originates in?

Genre classification seems to be a very confusing point in film theory, but one may wonder whether or not generic coding is a bonus to authorship. Raphaëlle Moine does answer this question: “Les études sur

⁴ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), pp.84-85.

⁵ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), pp.84-85.

auteurs tendent très généralement à détacher le film d'auteur de son ancrage générique en montrant comment il dépasse, transgresse ou transcende les limites du genre.”⁶ One could therefore assume that working within the confines of a certain *genre* would not be beneficial to directors who view themselves as authors.

2. Generic coding: a security

As stated above, *genres* might discredit the talent of a director because “*genre*’s capacity for positive identification is matched by a tendency to view certain *genres*, and thus *genre* production in general, as bad objects”.⁷ This negative feeling about generic coding is due to the fact that many think that

the repetitive and cumulative nature of *genre* films makes them also quite predictable. Not only can the substance and the ending of most *genre* films be predicted by the end of the first reel, but the repeated formulaic use of familiar stars usually makes them predictable on the basis of the title and the credits alone [...] In order to participate in the film’s strong emotions we must provisionally pretend we don’t know that the heroine will be rescued, the hero freed, and the couple reunited.⁸

However, this general assumption has an academic counterpart defending the point that “*Genre* offers neither a unique object of study nor the

⁶ Raphaëlle Moine, *Les Genres du Cinéma* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2005), p.94.

⁷ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.113.

⁸ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.25.

stability of an exactly duplicated text. There exists no generic original of which particular events might be represented as performances”.⁹ What Altman introduces here is the notion of *genre* as a body containing a multiplicity of possibilities amongst which the director and author have to choose. Although *genre* appears to be a restrictive requirement, it is more of a catalogue of tools and narrative events with which the film-makers can play forever.

Moreover, *genres* are constantly evolving: “most critics remain unaware that generic cartography involves multiple superimposed maps of differing age and extents”.¹⁰ It proves that *genres* can offer a space for creativity and *genre* renewal, which can attract both fans of the *genre* and people who are not, but who are attracted by the new elements introduced.

This point leads us inevitably to the interest production companies have in classifying new films into a specific *genre*. *Genre* and box-office success cannot be separated from each other: *genre* creation lies on audience response and audiences are sometimes drawn to watch a film because of its generic features. Production companies therefore highlight the generic pertaining of films in order to make profit:

a basic Hollywood strategy: even if the film boasts a strong proprietary draw (such as a star, a character or a plot), it never hurts to maximise opportunities for success by building

⁹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.83.

¹⁰ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.70.

an interlaced, multi-generic plot offering every possible chance for positive audience response.¹¹

In other words: the more different generic-features are publicised, the more successful the film. It also leads us to consider generic blending and other generic drifts.

3. Generic drifts

Il apparaît même que les films de genre pur sont plus rares que les films de genre mêlé [...] C'est pourquoi il est plus intéressant d'analyser les causes et les conditions particulières de tel ou tel phénomène d'hybridité, que d'essayer de faire valoir des critères de définition générique dans le but de rendre simple un objet qui ne l'est pas.¹²

Raphaëlle Moine denounces here the attempt at simplifying film studies by ignoring or subverting *genre* features that do not fit within the main *genre* of a film. She asserts that most films show generic blending and that this, in itself, is a focus of study. *Genre* is never exclusive; it is even in the inclusion of other *genres* that the film-maker finds a certain liberty in his/her creation and it allows him/her to stand out from the rest of the film industry.

However, this generic drift might go out of control up to the point where its result is unsuccessful and hard to engage with: "Le cinéma populaire supporte mal le mélange des *genres* et quand le mélodrame croise l'esthétisme ou le psychologisme, il tombe dans l'académisme, reniant ainsi

¹¹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p.139.

¹² Raphaëlle Moine, *Les Genres du Cinéma* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2005), p.102.

les valeurs qui ont fait son succès”.¹³ What Anne-Marie Baron criticises here are lame attempts by directors to uplift popular *genres* to intellectual levels by mixing them with *genres* more praised by intellectuals: this has no other effect but to create a commercial failure. She seems to be more in favour of delineating *genres* and only blending them with other *genres* (provided they all correspond to the liking of a single target audience) instead of trying to reach several target audiences by randomly incorporating features of many *genres*.

It has been agreed that *genres* may – and to some extent must – evolve, borrow, and blend but that a certain consistency has to be borne in mind so that a *genre* can remain successful amongst its usual audience. About Alfred Hitchcock’s *Marnie*, Elizabeth Ann Kaplan writes:

[Marnie] intermixes the stuff of melodrama (Marnie’s family history) with the thriller (Marnie as the criminal whose deeds must be investigated) so as to permit a patriarchal investigation into the very mystery of woman herself. The film, then, unlike the woman’s melodrama, speaks from the male position, very much as does most film noir.¹⁴

La Demoiselle d’Honneur also corresponds to this description and “intermixes” these three *genres* in a noticeable manner: Philippe is

¹³ Anne-Marie Baron, *Romans Français du XIX siècle adaptés à l’écran. Problème de l’adaptation* (Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2008), p.18.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.119.

“unravel[ing] the mystery”¹⁵ (film noir) that is Senta (melodrama) and about the murders she committed (thriller). *La Cérémonie* also offers a very dense and interesting blending of *genres*, as shall be explained below.

Now that *genre* relevance had been proven, this study shall turn to the three *genres* featured in the corpus and assess, confirm or deny the films pertaining to each of these *genres*.

B. *Film noir*

Although Chabrol's films are usually related to the thriller, I shall first turn to *film noir* in order to show how *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* belong to it. The reason why I am turning to a study of the *film noir*-features of our corpus first is because they seem to precede those of the thriller in both films, as I shall demonstrate. The branding of these films as *films noirs* might seem far-fetched to some viewers but a closely-led study evidences this interrelation. This part of my study will highlight the *film noir genre's* main features and compare the films in our corpus to this theoretical guideline.

Theoretical works on Chabrol often attest to the influence of Austrian Film director Fritz Lang, who developed *film noir*.

What Chabrol learned from Lang's cinema was the use of dispassionate, objective camera-work to evoke the theme of fate, and the importance of expressionist mise-en-scène – in

¹⁵ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.120.

other words, the manipulation of décors and objects to convey atmosphere and meaning¹⁶

I shall now demonstrate how *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* belong to this *genre*; and which visual and narrative clues point towards it.

1. ***Film noir* décors and sets**

Guy Austin states about *La Cérémonie*: “Lang’s legacy [to Chabrol] is clearest in terms of décor”.¹⁷ This is also true about *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* in which Senta’s house is typical of the *genre*. Austin links décor with *film noir* even more by explaining that “the principal sites of communication or passage between the two spaces are the main staircase and the oval mirror in the hall”.¹⁸ I shall therefore study these two common pieces of furniture within the frame of the *film noir* in both films.

The most characteristic feature in a *film noir*’s décor is the staircase and the use that is made of it. Let us turn first to *La Cérémonie* and study the importance of the staircase in it. It has to be noted that the Lelièvres’ house features not only one staircase but two of them (and possibly three as the drawing-room balcony is only ever shown partly out of shot and might have its own staircase). Austin’s study of the use of the staircase in this film shows that Sophie will only use the secondary staircase as long as she pays some respect to the family. Once she has lost this respect, she uses the main

¹⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.9.

¹⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.159.

¹⁸ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.161.

staircase, thereby increasingly intruding into her masters' domain ("It is only when she has learned to use the main stairs for her own purposes, and to infiltrate the master bedroom, that Sophie masters the house"¹⁹). One can also note that Georges is the only member of the family who is shown using the servant's staircase (Catherine is only shown upstairs, but not actually climbing the stairs), and he only does so once: when he dismisses Sophie for her behaviour towards Melinda. This intrusion into her domain feels like the opening of the conflicts between her and the Lelièvres; and it marks the invasion of her physical territory by the family, right after Melinda has discovered Sophie's secret and invaded her psychological private domain.

La Demoiselle d'Honneur offers a very interesting use of the staircase device as well, which fits with the *film noir* aspect. Senta's massive house appears to Philippe as an apartment lot but, in fact, she is the sole owner and only shares it with her surrogate parents. Besides, the house is never really seen as part of a street but appears as a stand-alone house, completely secluded from the rest of the world. The most intriguing fact is that Senta does not live in the house as such but only in its basement, which arouses Philippe's interest. The young man will climb the stairs only to find a dead end: a locked door. Not only does the locked door frustrate the viewer's curiosity about what might be hidden behind it, but it also stands as a crucial gateway towards something important, as the absence of doorstep shows (it is not a place where one can stay but only a step one has to go through). On the other hand, the stairs leading to the basement where Senta lives are the

¹⁹ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.161.

ones that Philippe looks at with disgust: they are narrow, dark and oppressive, and they lead towards an open doorframe to Senta's below ground-level room. Based on their colour, material and narrowness, they can be compared to the stairs in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), which adds to the feeling of uneasiness which overwhelms the viewer (see Figure 11). One can also note the circles surrounding the frame in both shots inserted below, and notice the attempt Chabrol made at making this staircase look like Murnau's *Nosferatu*'s (see the corners of Figure 11). These circles give the impression that the shot is subjective and that someone or something is looming and watching the protagonists. This strengthens the point made in Chapter I that this basement is like the beast's den: it is linked with danger, with worrying elements that make the viewer ill-at-ease.



Figure 11: Nosferatu's basement stairs



Figure 12: Senta's basement stairs

Another piece of furniture usually plays a major role in a film's visual symbolism: the mirror. In these films, Chabrol uses the mirror as a *film noir* feature and grants it *film noir* significance.

On this aspect as well, Austin has made a very interesting study of the use of the doorway mirror in *La Cérémonie*:

If the first close-up on Sophie's face in the mirror suggests impotence (she appears to read a note, but cannot in fact read), the next suggests power (as she listens to Melinda's phone conversation and learns about her secret pregnancy).²⁰

This mirror has in itself a mirror effect that firstly disembodies all power from Sophie but then grants it back to her. The very first time this doorway mirror appears in the film, it shows Sophie closing the door on Mrs Lelièvre, who is leaving for work. The fact that Sophie is seen only briefly in the mirror is a clue towards the fact that she is slowly and discreetly taking

²⁰ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.161.

control over the house, and replacing Mrs Lelièvre in her housewife's duties (see II.D.1 below).

La Demoiselle d'Honneur counts four uses of a mirror, all four of them having a different meaning. The first mirror featured in the film shows Philippe's sister, Sophie, and her mother, arranging the bride's veil: the concurrence of the veil and the mirror (that stands here for the unreal, for the faked) convey a feeling of uneasiness felt by the bride (she is uncertain about her marriage with Jacky) and the whole film will highlight her mistake (see Chapter I above). The next mirror is shown in Senta's house (see Figure 13): it is a full-size mirror, giving the impression of another door next to that of a former living-room, which has now been deserted. The living-room only contains furniture covered with linen, which metaphorically stands for the fact that Senta wants to hide things she is not proud of (more precisely, her murders). This mirror seems to offer an alternative to Philippe: he can either choose the actual door and slowly uncover the truth, or he could choose the mirror way, that of lies and self-deception. He will pick reality and therefore enter Senta's sick game.



Figure 13: Philippe's dilemma

Then, the brief shot on his eyes in the rear-view mirror emphasises the fact that Philippe is only a part of himself when Senta will not return his calls. Lastly, the couple are shown having intercourse in Senta's mirror. This shot of a mirror symbolises Philippe's going through to another world: the world in which Senta lives, which involves crime and lies. It is indeed after this shot that Philippe makes the decision that he will make up a murder to satisfy Senta.



Figure 14: Passionate love in a mirror

Now that I have shown how two specific features of the houses fit within the *film noir*, I shall relate the two houses themselves to these usually featured in this *genre*. “Houses and apartments almost always express their occupants’ state of mind or destiny... The house in *La Cérémonie* is large and isolated”,²¹ Austin writes. In *La Demoiselle d’Honneur*, Senta’s house is also representative of her state of mind: she is a bright young woman whose capabilities are numerous but she limits herself to her fantasy world and her devotion to her boyfriend the same way as she limits her occupation of the house to the basement instead of using the whole of it. The most intriguing characteristic of houses in *film noir* is their capability to hide secrets, to “function as enclosed worlds”.²² Although it is easy to understand that the secret hidden in Senta’s house is the corpse of her ex-boyfriend’s mistress, the secret contained in the Lelièvres’ house is not as clear-cut. The viewer is told that Melinda is pregnant although she is not; he/she can expect devious strategies by the Lelièvres to give Sophie the sack when they simply let Georges ask her to go,... However, the household harbours a secret that will never be unveiled: the Lelièvres’ past. Jeanne’s fantasies about the family sound totally out-of-context and exaggerated but what if she was telling the truth? Jeanne keeps on repeating about Mrs Lelièvre that “On voit bien qu’elle a été mannequin. On me dit que non mais moi je suis sûre que c’est vrai” and about the whole family “Je sais que votre femme c’est une putain et que l’autre elle valait pas mieux ; d’ailleurs c’est pas étonnant qu’elle se soit suicidée”. Georges Lelièvre’s extreme reaction to the latter statement

²¹ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.160.

²² Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.160.

strengthens the doubts the viewer has about the family, as does the fact that Jeanne's assumptions are never proved wrong. It shows that the family's past is kept secret, as opposed to the maid's and the postmistress', whose deeds are exposed in the papers and by word of mouth.

Chabrol makes use of the main symbols of *film noir* in these two films, but his attempt at creating a *film noir* goes further with the use of visual devices characteristic of the *genre*.

2. *Film noir* visual devices

"The main legacy of *film noir* is found in [...] the use of expressionism – looming shadows, unsettling camera angles – to evoke a chaotic and amoral universe".²³

Both *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* feature visual clues towards their classification as *Films Noirs*. In *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol smoothly introduces the use of shadows up to the point of the murder, which occurs at night. The very first night shot is taken in the gun-room, through which Sophie and Jeanne sneak into the house to watch a film without the Lelièvres knowing it (see Figure 15). It is about an hour in and, so far, very few dark shots have been seen, and they were all taken in daylight (the ones in Sophie's brown-walled bedroom and the ones where Jeanne speaks ill of Catherine in the master bedroom). By contrast, many of the scenes before that were lit in crude denouncing light, often emphasising Sophie's

²³ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.93.

helplessness; when she tries to decipher Catherine's note for instance (see Figure 16).

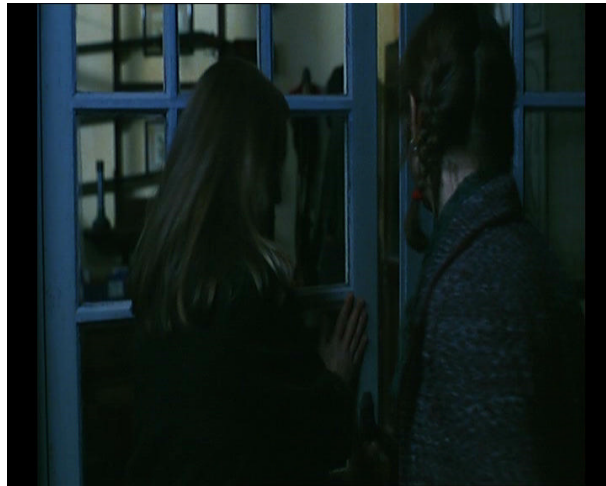


Figure 15: Sophie and Jeanne through the gun room



Figure 16: Crude lights reveal Sophie's helplessness

The darkness will from then on only grow, up to the point where it has taken over the whole screen and only the dim light from Jeanne's car will shed a little light on the screen when they drive up to the Lelièvres' for the very last time.

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, the colouring of the whole film is in itself very dark. Each and every scene has a blue colouring that gives the whole action a sense of melancholy and coldness representative of Senta's cold-blooded murders. The place where the young woman lives is itself, due to its below ground-level location, very dark and oppressive. Besides, the massive house conveys a feeling of uneasiness strengthened by the fact that the house is never sunlit but always very shadowy. Chabrol plays on the colouring of the film from the very first shots: the start credits (see Figure 17). This screenshot shows the cold blue colouring of the credits which will reappear later on in the film (most notably during the rainy wedding). It is also interesting to note that the title of the film is shown in a shot that also features a huge metallic structure, metal being a material that also inspires coldness.

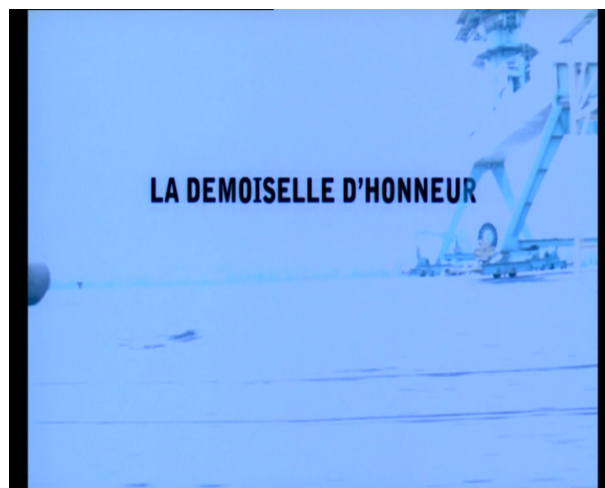


Figure 17: A cold-coloured start

Austin evokes “unsettling camera angles” in his definition of *film noir*, and Chabrol uses this technique in both films in our corpus. The most unsettling one is indubitably the bird-eye view from the attic in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* (see Chapter I above): this shot introduces a room, the locked door

of which was only shown from the outside; it looms over the characters as if they were only insects and poses the question of whose point of view it stands for. *La Cérémonie* also offers such unsettling camera angles as studied in Chapter I above: the high-angle view from the balcony is highly disconcerting for the viewer. One can also think of the tracking back of the camera when the murderers enter the drawing-room, menacing Gilles with their gunshots. The viewer is at this moment under threat thanks to the way the shot is driven, which is typical of *film noir* “unsettling” techniques.



Figure 18: The viewer is under threat

3. *Femmes fatales?*

The characters in *film noir* are also of a very specific type: Austin evokes “childless couples” and “*femmes fatales*”. Both of these characters’ types are featured in Chabrol’s adaptations of Rendell’s novels. Be it either Senta and Philippe and Sophie and Jacky in *La Demoiselle d’Honneur*, Melinda and Jérémie or even Georges and Catherine (who did not have children together) in *La Cérémonie*, this presence of childless couples

symbolises the lack of continuity in life, leading to the extinction of the family or of greater schemes such as social classes (see II.C.3 below) due to the lack of descending lineage.

The theme of the *femme fatale* is central to *film noir* and both films offer a reasonable number of clues towards the classification of one of their characters as a “seductive but dangerous *femme fatale*”,²⁴ as Austin puts it. He refers to the first steps (quite literally since she is seen descending the stairs) of Sophie as the Lelièvres’ maid: “Framing (the focus on her legs), costume (she has put on a dark dress) and lighting (she emerges from the shadows) all comply with *film noir* conventions, and encode Sophie as a *femme fatale*”.²⁵ Figure 19 below shows Sophie presented as a *femme fatale* both by the way she is dressed but also by the glamorous position she (probably unwillingly) holds: the verticality of the shot (reinforced by the edge of the wall, the staircase and of course by the fact that she is standing) makes her look thin and attractive. Besides, she also appears as very dark and her face is indecipherable, two elements that make her look as a shadow lurking in the house now.

²⁴ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.93.

²⁵ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.158.



Figure 19: Sophie encoded as a *femme fatale*

It is also easy to assimilate Senta to the *femme fatale* model since she goes even further than Sophie in drawing Philippe into the shadows due to her sensuality. Furthermore, she also wears dark garments on the night Philippe waits for her in his car and mistakes her for “some unappetising prostitute” as Rendell puts it, emphasising her sexual power and dark side. In the screenshots below, one can clearly see Philippe being sucked into Senta’s darkness. The young woman is almost invisible because she sits in the darkness and her hand slowly covers Philippe’s face and draws him towards the shadow.



Figure 20: Senta and Philippe kiss



Figure 21: Senta drags Philippe into the darkness

“Les films noirs reprennent cet isolement social [...] en sortant la femme du cadre familial pour en faire une femme fatale”.²⁶ both Senta and Sophie are childless and will remain so. The lack of stability that a family would offer leads them to their outlawed acts.

However, although both Sophie and Senta are undeniably *femmes fatales*, the maid's link to the seduction implied by this characterisation is very

²⁶ Raphaëlle Moine, *Les Genres du Cinéma* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2005), p.126.

atypical. Even though “dominance over the male characters”²⁷ is characteristic of the sexual behaviour of a *femme fatale*, Sophie seems to be unaware of her attractiveness and she never tries to use it as a token. This is demonstrated in the scene when the delivery-man tries to befriend her unsuccessfully. It is also highlighted when Jeanne evokes her fascination with Paul Newman and her attraction to him, which contrasts with Sophie’s discretion on that topic. Senta, on her part, is much more aware of her seductive potential and she uses sexuality as a weapon to trick Philippe into her madness, to escape uneasy situations (she pleases him so that he forgets about asking why she disappeared for several days) and of course to kill (she seduces her second victim as a fragile attractive young woman to kill him).

In addition, the *femmes fatales*’ treatments in the end of the films are also very different: whilst Senta is trapped into her basement and about to be discovered by the police, Sophie is out in the open and, even though tangible proof of her crime has been found, she remains likely to be able to make an escape. It is interesting to note that, as opposed to the *film noir*’s usual encoding, the *femmes fatales* here are not punished for their misdeeds, although they are found out and seem to have only very limited chances to escape their punishment. These *femmes fatales* do not suffer “the punishment the female characters ultimately undergo [in the *film noir*]”.²⁸

It cannot be denied that Chabrol encodes his two adaptations within some *film noir* principles; nevertheless, many elements remain

²⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.161.

²⁸ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.138.

uncharacteristic of the *genre* and must therefore belong to other *genres*. Chabrol declared “A un moment j’étais très langien...Je crois qu’avec l’âge on devient hitchcockien”;²⁹ meaning that after having worked on the *film noir*, he slowly turned to the thriller, which is what I shall do in this study as well.

C. The thriller *genre(s)*

On the grounds that both films in our corpus are adapted from crime novels and feature murders and climactic suspense, their classification as thrillers seems to make sense. Chabrol being an adept of the *genre* for the fact that “c’est le *genre* qui emmerde le moins le public”³⁰ according to him, he did shoot these films within the thriller *genre*. However, the thriller *genre* is much more complicated than the traits that are usually used to describe it and comprises of many more characteristics. Is the thriller a homogeneous *genre* or does it consist of several trends? If so, what are they? What elements in these two films belong to the thriller’s characteristics both in the diegesis and in the narrative techniques used?

1. The thriller *subgenres*

First and foremost, it is important to bear in mind that there is not only one type of thriller, but that the thriller *genre* comprises of many *subgenres*. In 2002, Steve Neale talked about a thriller *genre* that “consisted

²⁹ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.10.

³⁰ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.4.

of three strands: courtroom/law, serial killer, and predatory female”.³¹ It is obvious that these three strands may easily be intertwined and that they are far from contradictory. To these three strands might be added a fourth one, evoked by Paul Cobby as a film strand but which could belong to the thriller *genre*: the “paranoid film”.³² While the courtroom/law *subgenre* does not apply to either film in our corpus, the other three seem to apply very well to both of them.

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Senta is the best representation of a serial killer: she kills several people using a fake identity (see II.C.2 below) and uses the same weapon every time: a Venetian glass dagger. The fact that she sticks to a specific method every time she kills is typical of a serial killer's psychology. Compared to Senta, Jeanne and Sophie in *La Cérémonie* have little to do with the serial killer strand since they do not operate in a systematic way or with a specific weapon. Jeanne is said to have accidentally killed her daughter by kicking the child towards the stove where she burnt to death. However, as suspected by many, she gives clues towards the deliberate character of this deed (“On n’a rien pu prouver”, “Comment veux-tu qu’une mère tue son enfant? C’est pas possible, hein. Même s’il est pas normal”). Sophie also saw her handicapped father die in a so-called “accidental” fire, but when she re-uses Jeanne’s “on n’a rien pu prouver”, fails to deny Jeanne’s accusations on her and mocks her late father (“c’est mon père qui sentait la pisse!”), she proves her guilt by acting like Jeanne – hence like a

³¹ Steve Neale, *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* (London, British Film Institute, 2002), p.179.

³² Paul Cobby, *The American Thriller* (New-York, Palgrave, 2000), p.161.

culprit – about this death. However, Sophie and Jeanne do not have a specific method when they kill; they are probably too impulsive for the idea to occur to them. It is yet very intriguing that they should appear to kill the Lelièvres rather methodically with two bullets directed at each member of the family, as if they were starting to use a killing pattern. Arguably, Sophie and Jeanne start liking taking people's lives and they try to insert professionalism in what they do best: killing the people standing on their way.

The predatory female has many points in common with the *femme fatale* studied above (see II.B.3 above) and although Jeanne is not encoded as a *femme fatale* according to Austin,³³ she is most certainly a predatory female in that she envies the Lelièvres and punishes them by the death penalty for being richer and more highly-ranked socially (III.C.2.b) below). Moreover, the word predatory refers to animals hunting on prey, which is literally what the three killers do: they hide, they keep up appearances up to the point when they take up their weapons (either guns like hunters or knives like butchers) and dive onto their prey, leaving them no chance to escape or defend themselves (the killers are never in the least injured by their victims).

Cobley's definition of the paranoid film is: "the audience is in full possession of the facts from a very early stage of the narrative, partly because of semantic cues; the suspense lies in how the conspiracy is uncovered".³⁴ Although Rendell's novels were undeniably constructed in such a way, Chabrol's films are more subtle in that domain. To a certain extent, *La*

³³ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.158.

³⁴ Paul Cobley, *The American Thriller* (New-York, Palgrave, 2000), p.161.

Cérémonie belongs to that scheme since the element that the viewer is aware of from the beginning of the film is Sophie's illiteracy. The resentment felt by Jeanne towards the family is also uncovered very early in the film and these elements are not to last for long, since they are incessantly exacerbated. Therefore, the viewer needs to be highly paranoid himself/herself to understand that the family will be slaughtered in the end. However, a sane spirit can easily view that things will have to change eventually, and that these unhealthy situations grow towards a crucial *denouement* (i.e. the murder). On the other hand, *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* can be related to the paranoid film in a much more straightforward manner. The very first shot of the film deals with the disappearance of a young woman and the – rather pessimistic – assumption by one of the characters that she might be dead. The fact that this *fait-divers* keeps on reappearing in the film grants it with a certain importance. It can only lead the viewer to think that he/she shall be given an explanation about this disappearance, gradually suspecting Senta. Moreover, placing Philippe as the main character, and following his path along this rather confusing relationship with Senta makes the reader very suspicious as well, first about her feelings and behaviour towards him, then about her lies and fantasies, which finally turn out to be true. As opposed to Rendell, Chabrol has chosen to reduce the paranoid *subgenre* to its minimum in *La Cérémonie* by concealing the Lelièvres' doom until the end. He thereby created the maximum level of suspense and made the ending much more shocking to the viewer. His aim is undoubtedly to describe the bourgeoisie and show what leads to its destruction by creating the feeling that frustrations are adding up, up to the point where they cannot be borne any longer.

2. Instability of the identities

In his book entitled *The American Thriller*, Paul Cobley evokes Palmer's theory that states that "[relations in the thriller] comprise the role of the hero as a competitive individual",³⁵ which fits perfectly with the description one could give of Senta. The lead female character in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* apprehends the whole killing process as a game. She challenges Philippe to this game and hopes for a good result as a proof of his love for her. She exposes her killing stories as trophies and expects to be congratulated for being so creative when tricking her victims into a trap. In *La Cérémonie*, the competition does not really take place amongst the killers, but there is surely an attempt to overthrow the family for what they represent (as shall be studied in II.C.3 below).

Colin Crisp talks about "fanciful selves" and "fantasised identities"³⁶ in the thriller *genre*. In *La Cérémonie*, fantasised identities exist through what is shown on television. It is television that allows both Sophie and Jeanne to escape everyday life and jump into a fantasised life. This is why Jeanne seems to nurture the dream of dating Paul Newman and this is how Sophie increases her criminal knowledge. The court television series she comes across when she first turns her set on is probably a crime database from which she learns how to master crime. This is probably the reason why, after the murder, Jeanne assumes Sophie "sait comment faire" and the latter calmly replies "oui, je m'en occupe". On a more psychological note, it is easy

³⁵ Paul Cobley, *The American Thriller* (New-York, Palgrave, 2000), p.3.

³⁶ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), p.6.

to see that Sophie uses television as a means to retrieve childhood since she watches children's programmes such as Les Minikeums and a show hosted by young Maureen Door who worked in children programmes most of her career. However, Sophie cannot really fit within the target of the show since the host talks about books and knowledge (two domains Sophie hates with a passion): "Les dictionnaires avant c'était ennuyeux. Maintenant ils ont mis plein d'images".

Studying television and its impact necessarily leads us to consider Senta, who claims to be an actress, i.e. a person who impersonates characters and becomes somebody else daily. Senta uses this skill even when she kills: not only does she impersonate a fragile young woman who has something stuck in her eye to kill someone who she believes is Courtois; but she even goes so far as to impersonate her ex-boyfriend in order to entrap his new lover and kill her too. One can also relate this whole acting trait to the contradictory attitude Senta sometimes has towards Philippe: she sometimes disappears for days after having said she cannot live without him. Besides, as studied in Chapter I, Senta is not even her real name but an identity she has randomly chosen: "Elle s'appelle Stéphanie, mais tous les six mois elle se trouve un nouveau prénom", Sophie Tardieu says. It is interesting to note how Senta fits into Crisps' writings:

Characters construct fantasised identities, whether for themselves or as totally independent characters [... and they] often find themselves trapped into living out the fictional identities that they have created around themselves, and the

compulsive story-teller may find his or her self diffused
among a number of equally fanciful invented selves.³⁷

Even more unsettling is the fact that Crisp evokes in his study of the 1930s films “a fascination with the opposition between femaleness and the more aggressive maleness, as evidenced in the soldier”.³⁸ In other words, Crisp thinks that gender instability is central to the thriller *genre*. In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, as studied just above, Senta can impersonate whoever she wants to achieve her aims, namely killing people on her way to happiness. She does impersonate her ex-boyfriend, Martin, in order to attract his new lover and get revenge on her, by killing her and letting her rot in the attic of the house. What is most interesting here is that Senta needs maleness as a tool to kill. However, for her second murder – on a man this time – Senta does not need to use male attributes: she has managed to kill whilst remaining in her own gender, which shows that violence is now intrinsic to her and no longer part of an act. One can also notice that maleness and femaleness are very blurred in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*: it is Senta who impersonates power and roughness as opposed to Philippe who is more sensitive. Senta seems to play with his feelings and to be in total control of the relationship, including the instigation (or not) of sexual intercourse. She also owns her own house and lives self-sufficiently, which is a sign of power. Her bedroom does not strike the viewer as girly: it is dark and rather cold. On the contrary, Philippe is very close to his relatives, very tender with her and he is

³⁷ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), p.6.

³⁸ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), p.20.

in total contrast with Senta's roughness. He also is the one who pays attention to details and atmospheres, mainly by commenting on everything that is not "normal" in Senta's house (most significantly on the bad smell of the rotten body in the attic).

Gender instability also appears in *La Cérémonie*, but on more symbolic a scale. Sophie, who is a housemaid, therefore embodying typical female attributes, becomes a completely different person when she holds the gun and masters its use, hardly taken aback by the impact of the shots she fires. In a sense, she incorporates male attributes by using a gun (hunting being typically a male hobby). Jeanne also shows signs of gender instability but in her case, it is not something temporary that she acquires at the moment of the crime: it is inherent to what she is. This can be seen in her clothes (leather jacket), in the lack of attention she puts into her dressing (her short skirt is lifted up by the wind at the church), her posture (on her knees, thighs apart on her bed or for her charity round in town),... Therefore, the fact that she is the one who wants to play with Georges's guns and scare the Lelièvres off is deeply related to the male aggressiveness mentioned by Crisp since she uses a weapon typically used by males who go hunting.

The thriller seems to have troubled identities as a key-feature, but it also appears to have specific narrative twists.

3. Dynamics of the thriller

Relations [in the thriller *genre*] comprise the role of the hero as a competitive individual professional, the threat of conspiracy, the role of the villain in this conspiracy and the

restoration of social order [...] The notion of conspiracy is so wide and accommodating that it enables an expansive range of diverse texts.³⁹

Here, Paul Cobley introduces the notion of a political struggle in the thriller *genre*: the killers do not take people's lives for their own pleasure but they might be trying to prove a point or to settle an ongoing issue that cannot be solved otherwise. Cobley also introduces the fact that what the killers fight for is not necessarily the same, and that they might have different views and values that they are trying to defend. In *La Cérémonie*, the conspiracy is of a political nature, with an overthrowing by the lower class (to which Sophie and Jeanne belong) of the middle-class bourgeoisie (the Lelièvres). These murders do not strike the viewer as politically motivated although they are politically symbolical. One could even wonder whether Sophie and Jeanne even realise the greater scheme in which their forfeit is inscribed (see III.C.2.b) below). As a matter of fact, it fits perfectly with what Chabrol thinks the social order should be. His political views have changed a lot over the decades; and from the time he belonged to the Parisian Corpo chaired by current Front National leader Jean-Marie Le Pen up to the time he shot *La Cérémonie*, his views have drifted to the left a lot. He even said "Je me borne à accepter des dogmes pour des temps limités : par exemple, en ce moment, je me dis qu'après tout, le marxisme-léninisme n'est pas plus con qu'autre chose".⁴⁰ Chabrol "says that he finds it ludicrous that the class struggle is

³⁹ Paul Cobley, *The American Thriller* (New-York, Palgrave, 2000), p.3.

⁴⁰ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.92.

deemed by some to have fallen with the Berlin wall”⁴¹ because, according to him, the bourgeoisie was still present after 1989, although weakened. This is why in *La Cérémonie* in 1995, he decides to put a doubtless end to the existence of the bourgeois by killing off the Lelièvres and their children, because the time has now come to do so. The social aspect of this murder turns this film into “le dernier film marxiste”⁴² in Chabrol’s own words, since Sophie and Jeanne’s aim is achieved. However, the class struggle is not over although the bourgeoisie seems to have been defeated. It is also important to note that the “restoration of the social order” is not obvious here since Jeanne is killed by accident and Sophie is subject to an ending open to interpretation, or at the very least she is not shown being punished, which leaves a murderer out in the open.

La Demoiselle d'Honneur is not political and does not offer a field of study in the “restoration of the social order” context. Yet, it is self-evident that Senta wants to install in real life the universe she fantasises by killing as well: her victims are both people who stood in her way at some point, forcing her to revise her original plans, so she could not but kill them. When Raphaëlle Pélissier entered Senta’s boyfriend’s life and stole him from the young woman, her plans of living with him forever, for she thought they were soul mates, were compromised. Killing the mistress was a way to come back to the original plan and move forward again. Unfortunately, Martin seemed to be deeply in love with Raphaëlle since he never returned to Senta, whose

⁴¹ Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.104.

⁴² Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.154.

strategy failed and led to her meeting Philippe and playing the same game with him. But Philippe was to be transformed by Senta: for her plans to go perfectly (a standard that she will not make any compromise on), she and her boyfriend have to be perfectly happy, without any single detail contradicting this happiness. When Philippe confesses his resentment for the man who hurt his mother, Senta wants to get rid of the man forever so that Philippe can be blissfully happy. In these two films, crime is only a tool to achieve a greater scheme, as Cobley seems to suggest is typical of the thriller *genre*; it is never a goal in itself.

“The role of the outsider, of course, is to show up the hollowness of the said social order, to expose it to ridicule, to subvert and disrupt its routines and assumptions”.⁴³ It has already been said that Jeanne is not encoded as a *film noir femme fatale*, and the role that Colin Crisp defines here is probably the definition that fits Jeanne most: she is the one who sneaks into the family and into their house; she is the one who intrudes into Sophie’s life to see more of the Lelièvres’ interior, and private life. Jeanne is the outsider, and she also does “expose to ridicule” the bourgeois attitudes: “le seul problème qu’ils ont c’est de savoir s’ils vont s’acheter une voiture rouge ou une voiture bleue, ou que le cousin machin va pas piquer la moitié de l’héritage de la grand-mère”. And, most obviously, she is the one who first enters the spiral that will lead her and Sophie to kill the family, and the one who controls its gradation by seizing the gun first. She acts as a catalyst for Sophie’s frustration towards

⁴³ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), p.XXIV.

her employers and she is the one who drags Sophie into hating them, up to the point where simply knowing they are alive is unbearable.

“Most murder mysteries involve an investigation to determine the identity of the criminal”.⁴⁴ If the two novels by Rendell did include investigations on the murders, Chabrol's films do not feature this part of the books. *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* shows the police station and how they relate Philippe to Senta because of his sister's theft, but the viewer does not follow the investigation process and the policemen are represented in a rather simplistic way (with features of slapstick comedy such as tripping on dog's excrement when on a lead). *La Cérémonie* also briefly shows the police squad and they are shown playing back the tape on which the murder was recorded but, then again, one can hardly refer to this as to an investigation per se. Crisp makes it clear that the investigation part is not featured in each and every thriller, but Chabrol chooses to leave it aside twice in order to leave space for a third *genre*: the melodrama.

D. The melodramatic *genre*

“Melodrama at heart represents the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse towards dramatisation, heightening, expression, acting out”.⁴⁵ This definition of the melodrama is the reason why it is often disregarded and

⁴⁴ Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002), p.5.

⁴⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976), p.XI.

looked down upon by intellectuals. The drive towards exaggeration that is central to it is harmful to the *genre's* reputation which comprises of many more features, which many are unaware of. I shall study the two films of the corpus through the lens of the melodramatic main features, that is to say the place of the mother, the theme of the double and its link with social class matters.

1. The central figure of the mother

“Tu sais je crois que c’est l’être le plus courageux que je connaisse [...] elle nous a élevés toute seule et elle s’est toujours privée pour qu’on manque de rien”. In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Philippe’s admiration for his mother is typical of the melodramatic *genre*: it places the mother at the centre of the story and conveys the importance of the feeling in the storyline. “Melodrama is traditionally associated with representations of motherhood and is used by Chabrol to address questions of maternity”.⁴⁶ The character of Christine is very important in the film: she is the centre of attention of the whole family who gather around her, live with her at the beginning of the film and take specific care of her when she is in emotional distress. They all want to protect her from “un autre salaud” as Philippe puts it and from being taken advantage of by the neighbourhood (“Elle peut pas faire sa couleur toute seule Mme Perotti?!”). However, she is not so weak a character, contrary to what they all seem to think. Her time as a single parent working at home has given her strength; and her break up with Courtois does not cause her excessive sorrow. She is even capable of asserting her views whenever the

⁴⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.83.

interior peacefulness of her home is under threat: "Patricia, ça suffit!", she shouts at her daughter for insisting on the fact that Senta did not take any care of her bridesmaid dress. These rare outbursts of anger are compensated by her irrepressible desire to do whatever her children might need: she does the laundry, cooks for them (going so far as to propose spreading jam on Philippe's toast), enquires about their personal or professional lives without being intrusive,... Yet, this excess of devotion to her children conceals her loneliness. A subtle hint at this is the fact that as soon as she hears the door open, she asks "C'est toi Philippe?" hoping for the presence of an adult to back her up in Patricia's education or simply for a manly presence in her home. Indeed, for Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, it is "clear first that a mother should not be too much with her children, and second that being a mother comes second to being a wife"⁴⁷. As a consequence, Christine would be able to balance the excessive attention she gives to her children if she were married. But Christine has been a widow for many years and she struggles to find suitable dates (as shown by the failure of her relationship with Gérard Courtois) so her relationship to her children has become prevalent to any other, thereby creating an unhealthy atmosphere within the household. Christine puts Philippe in the most difficult position in that she considers him as her peer as regards his younger sister's education, which prevents him from reaching the traditional step of independence from excessive mother love: "The cultural codes for mother love already contain an element of dedicated devotion, whereas the adult male is supposed to have *freed himself*

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.84.

from the weakness, even *unnaturalness*, that *excessive mother love* signifies”⁴⁸ (my emphasis).

Accordingly to the role of the mother in the melodramatic *genre*, the character of Christine in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* is praised in her role of mother. Besides, she is granted a certain importance in being treated as a round character (see I.A.3 above) in that each scene shows different facets of her personality. The roundness of her character is also conveyed by the fact that, in maternal melodrama, the mother is represented as “a paternal function”⁴⁹, which adds yet another facet to Christine’s character.

Although the theme of the double is our next focus of study, it is interesting to observe that *La Cérémonie*’s Catherine acts as a perfect counterpart to Christine. She does show interest in her family but she is too self-interested to provide them with food or to do the housework. This is the reason why she wants to introduce a housemaid into their estate, thereby leading her family to its fate (“Within the generic code of the maternal melodrama, women are often punished for becoming bad mothers – usually for seeking a role outside the home”⁵⁰). All the house chores handled by Christine in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* are delegated to Sophie in *La Cérémonie*: the maid cooks, cleans the house, does the laundry and talks with the children (mainly with Melinda). Yet, both Christine and Sophie suffer from

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.70

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.69.

⁵⁰ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.135.

a very empty social life as housewives which is what Catherine cannot deal with: her work at the gallery and her social skills (which she demonstrates when receiving guests for Melinda's birthday) are central to her well-being and it is probably the reason why she did not isolate herself from the outside world when she parted from her first husband, as opposed to Christine.

As the character of the mother stands for the feelings and the closeness of family links, it is a key-feature of the melodramatic *genre*. Both films in our corpus entrust the figure of the housewife with a central role and they thereby belong in the melodramatic *genre*.

2. The theme of the double

Melodrama in its very definition relies on duality, either in its characters or in its dynamics. Brooks writes that the "dramatic choice between heightened moral alternatives [...] is charged with the conflict between light and darkness, salvation and damnation".⁵¹ Austin even evokes "doubling [as] a key-theme" and the importance of the character of the "evil twin"⁵² in melodrama. Both films feature this notion of antipodal characters linked either by their acts, or by their appearance.

Firstly, *La Cérémonie* offers a murderous couple functioning under this doubling process. Whilst Sophie is a very thorough housekeeper, Jeanne is careless about everyday chores ("Laisse, on la fera après" she tells Sophie about the washing-up). Whilst Sophie is dedicated to her employer, Jeanne

⁵¹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976), p.5.

⁵² Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.71.

appears to be her own boss (or at least no direct superior of hers is seen in the film). Whilst Sophie's spare-time is spent watching television, Jeanne works for a charity and meets people. Before the time of the murder, Jeanne is the one who is restless and out-of-control as opposed to Sophie who acts very cold-bloodedly, hardly allowing herself a giggle when Jeanne is acting silly. However, this systematic opposition between the characters is subtly reversed along the film and they finally come to a sort of middle-ground settlement where their behaviours look alike. Once they start shooting the Lelièvres, Sophie and Jeanne behave in a similar way, gazing coldly at their victims and acting very nonchalantly.

La Cérémonie also offers a very interesting point in the duality of the mother figures, as was partly studied above. It features two women who bear the role of the mother, and whose way of dealing with motherhood seems opposed but also presents similarities. Jeanne used to be a mother and her child died – or was killed – burnt on the kitchen stove. She barely shows any signs of sadness when she tells the story and describes her late child as “pas normale”. Catherine Lelièvre, as opposed to Jeanne, is still a mother and seems to bear a very close relationship with her son, but she is also very independent and needs a role outside the home (see II.D.1 above). The best way to show their similarities is to compare their behaviour with Christine Tardieu's (see II.D.1 above) and it becomes obvious that Jeanne and Catherine stand together as Christine's counterpart. Kaplan mentions *East Lynne* by Barbara Hare which:

stands interestingly at the juncture of the melodramatic pattern that showed the family as threatened from the outside (by dangerous, usually male, figures, often aristocrats or men in authority abusing their power) and the later melodramas that explore the sexual dangers and problems within the nuclear family.⁵³

In other words, Catherine Lelièvre belongs to the old type of melodrama and is threatened by the outside, in this case not by men but by women acting as men with hunting guns. Jeanne rather resembles the second type of melodrama since she seems to “explore” homosexual relationships (as evoked in the film and stated in the novel). It has to be noted that neither the old nor the recent types of melodrama lead their mother figure to a salute here since they both die brutally (Catherine killed by the maids and Jeanne in a car accident as she escapes from the crime scene). This raises the question of which type of motherhood would be healthy and salutary, and maybe Melinda would have been the character to show this since there were high suspicions of her being pregnant, but she was not given the chance to give birth and therefore, no mothering solution is given in *La Cérémonie*.

In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, the “evil twin” has already been studied from a narrative point-of-view in I.C.3 above. The similarities between Senta and the Tardieus’ statue Flora are very disquieting and the part of the evil twin seems to be held by Senta here. Although, she is the one who is alive and therefore should have human features, Senta is deeply linked with

⁵³ Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation, The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.90.

death and darkness. Not only do her outfit and apartment show this, but the whole of her discourse does so too. She always addresses Philippe with poetic sentences implying destiny and inescapable love. Moreover, Philippe's love for Flora, which appears much less complicated, also shows that she is to be favoured over the woman. Nevertheless, Senta and Flora's roles are set on an equal footing by the end of the film as well: the statue watches the lovers and intrudes into their life as a couple, up to the point where she appears in the shot between their faces, slowly taking over from Senta in Philippe's life.

"The good people stay good. The villain stays bad... I wanted to make a melodrama, a real melodrama"⁵⁴ is how Chabrol described *La Rupture* (1970). It is therefore easy to tell that when shooting *La Cérémonie* and *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Chabrol's aim has changed since the theme of the double is not set into stone in these films. The notions of a villain and of a good person is ambivalent and it shows that here, Chabrol does not aim to shoot "a real melodrama", but only films with melodramatic features.

3. Melodrama and class interactions

Melodrama and class are intimately related", according to Austin, "The family whose drama the melodrama enacts is [...] the bourgeois family, therefore, the characters are neither the rulers nor the ruled, but occupy a middle-ground,

⁵⁴ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.70.

exercising local power, or suffering local powerlessness,
within the family of the small town.⁵⁵

Although social ranking is very secondary in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* in which only Courtois is clearly of a higher class than the Tardieus, the theme of class struggle is much more evident in *La Cérémonie*. Austin's study of this feature is very thorough and can only be agreed with. His point is that "the Lelièvre family are unobjectionable. Their only fault is in fact simply their function – as Sophie's employers, and as the embodiment of the bourgeoisie".⁵⁶ It is true that the murder occurs rather suddenly and unexpectedly, after minor frustrations that should not lead towards such extremes (Sophie's dismissal aside, maybe). Are the Lelièvres murdered for what they are (representatives of the "local power" through their small business) or for what they do (the way they treat Sophie and Jeanne)? It is very difficult to make a clear-cut judgement regarding this matter, and Chabrol probably intends it this way. "It is impossible to say whether Sophie and Jeanne commit the murders in order to avenge personal humiliations [...] or to reverse power relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie".⁵⁷

For his part, Chabrol gives clues towards the interpretation of these murders in interviews and books he wrote: "la famille bourgeoise n'est attaquable que par son état, c'est ça le marxisme" and "c'est le dernier film marxiste".⁵⁸ The way the Lelièvres embody the bourgeois family and their

⁵⁵ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.70.

⁵⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.153.

⁵⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.152.

⁵⁸ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.154-155.

slaughtering show that the last bourgeois have now disappeared, so there cannot be another Marxist film, since there is no bourgeoisie left. Chabrol's films featuring class struggle had never gone so far as to get rid of the bourgeoisie before: "The revolution, however, never happens: it is indefinitely deferred, as in *Nada* [1974] [...] and if it were to take place eventually, would not the new order be reminiscent of the old?"⁵⁹ The films where revolutions do happen, such as *Les Biches* (1967), only show the replacement of a class by another one. In *La Cérémonie*, however, the killers will not kill the bourgeois out of envy (maybe Jeanne will in a way, but it is not her main concern) and they certainly do not aim to replace the Lelièvres.

As previously stated, generic coding can be a restriction in the choices a director can make when shooting a film. Chabrol works around these restrictions by blending several *genres* in his films, thereby granting them with many more meanings and levels of analysis. Although film critics categorised these two productions as thrillers straightaway (probably due to the violent/sexual scenes that made them unsuitable for a wide-range audience), the other *genres* are not secondary. Ruth Rendell herself intended her novels to blend several *genres*: the source-novels are indeed crime novels but they are also a whole sociological and psychological study focusing on class interactions, feminism and sexual impulse, as shall be shown in the next chapter.

⁵⁹ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.91.

III. The blending of Rendell's and Chabrol's main themes

A. Overview of Ruth Rendell's style

Although she was said to belong to the literary current of female crime novelists of the twentieth century, Ruth Rendell seems to differ in many points from this category. In order to situate Rendell better in literary production, this study shall begin with a brief description of her career before turning to her approach to literature as it is shown in her books. Lastly, her way of dealing with crime will be the focus of the final part of this study.

1. Ruth Rendell's career

First and foremost, the main trait of Ruth Rendell's fiction is the fact that the instability of the identity of some of her characters (which was studied in Chapter II above) can be applied to her career. Ruth Rendell can indeed be described as a writer with several identities since her works do not offer a smooth and coherent *ensemble*. Some of her novels belong to the series known as "the Wexford series", which features the investigations of Chief Inspector Reg Wexford and which has been spread over decades (and is still going on, since she is planning to have a posthumous Wexford novel published in which the hero will die). However, the audience's taste for these novels was rather unfortunate for Rendell who was then followed by this success and asked to produce more Wexford novels when she aimed to write something different. Yet, she managed to write novels that were not part of

the Wexford series and these had very specific features, as shall be studied in III.A.3 below. Besides, not only did the writer publish under her own name, but she also used the pseudonym Barbara Vine to publish novels with features different to those she usually produced. She describes Vine's novels as "books whose characters are, according to her, ordinary people under extraordinary pressure [which] distinguish[es] them from the other non-series books that deal with psychopaths".¹ This gives us indications on how Rendell herself views the characters who kill in our corpus: in her eyes, Eunice, Joan and Senta are psychopaths; they are not ordinary people who went wrong under pressure.

Another fact that might shed more light on Rendell's versatility in writing is the fact that she is often studied in comparison with other authors. She is barely ever compared to male writers but almost always to female ones, and especially to Agatha Christie, who stands alone as the best-known female crime novelist. However, every comparative study of their work, and Rendell herself, claim that the two novelists' styles are very different. Rendell even said: "I don't think [Christie] ever studied the time that she was living in, and her novels are peopled with a group of stock characters... That is why I say she was superficial, and I don't think that I am".² This quotation shows that Rendell differentiates her writings from Christie's and she has led a whole study of the differences between them, which shall be our next focus of study.

¹ Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Authors of Detective Series* (London, McFarland, 2001), p.112.

² Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Authors of Detective Series* (London, McFarland, 2001), p.113.

2. Rendell's approach to literature

"Literacy is one of the cornerstones of civilisation. To be illiterate is to be deformed." (*A Judgement in Stone*, p.1)

Many of Rendell's novels are an embedded reflexion on literature and its reception, its effect. Reading too much or not reading at all can both be very harmful to a character's behaviour in a social context, and Rendell's argument is often stretched both ways. On the one hand, "Literature is dangerous: it not only provides vicarious living, fantasies, but it also promotes alternative visions and compels its readers to act on those alternatives";³ on the other hand "Eunice Parchman killed the Coverdale family because she could not read or write" is the opening sentence of *A Judgement in Stone*, proving that had Eunice been able to read, she might have found another way to express her frustration against the Coverdales. All in all, Rendell seems to "[believe] in the rightness of using literature to decode real life"⁴ as some of her characters do.

A Judgement in Stone is the perfect example of both extremities of the reading process. Giles Mont (the Coverdales' younger son) is a young man with a "passion for reading [that] contrasts vividly with the illiteracy of the deadly central character, Eunice Parchman".⁵ Eunice, for her part, is unable to read and this is probably the reason why she is drawn to kill in a way: she

³ Ana de Brito, *A guilty thing surprised: Literary Intertextuality in the Novels of Ruth Rendell* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1992), p.94.

⁴ Ana de Brito, *A guilty thing surprised: Literary Intertextuality in the Novels of Ruth Rendell* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1992), p.95.

⁵ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.131.

feels alienated and left apart from the rest of the world, especially at the Coverdales' who are all learned and slightly pedantic. Rowland writes: "In *A Judgement in Stone*, a female killer is dislodged from historical time and unable to manage a psycho-symbolic contract with society, here because she is illiterate".⁶ As opposed to young Giles, Eunice cannot spend her free-time reading books so she turns to television as a substitutive hobby and also secludes herself from the rest of the world, but in a more harmful way. Rendell seems to argue that television is a medium that does not educate. At most, it teaches practical skills (such as murder: "Thus it happened that the first programme Eunice ever saw on her own television dealt with violence and with firearms", p.41). On the contrary, literature teaches all sorts of things, and what Giles is most interested in is religion. His readings aim to find which religion is best and, probably, which would allow his almost incestuous love for his step-sister. All these readings lead him to be cut off from the world and the family who, in spite of their efforts, cannot settle him back into society. Arguably, extremities in terms of reading can only be harmful: "Eunice, Rendell argues, cannot empathise with others because she has not learnt to do so through reading. If Giles loses his ability to empathise because he substitutes reading for real life, the results would be identical".⁷

Giles's quest for a religious faith is also to be seen in relation with Joan's obsession with Christianity. The postmistress's extremist behaviour

⁶ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.96.

⁷ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.131.

contrasts highly with the young man's spiritual indecision. Their approach is completely different and although Rendell does not aim to classify religions in this book; she just "develops a lively scepticism about authority in general and religion in particular"⁸. This way of dealing with Christianity certainly leads the reader to question his/her religious views and motivations. "[Giles's] quest for faith points up the shallowness and horror of the maniacal religious fervour of Joan Smith".⁹

In addition to opposing Eunice to Giles, the maid's illiteracy also opposes her to the reader in that the reader is actually finding out about her life in a book, as a banal entertainment and it occurs to him/her that the action he/she is doing is exactly what Eunice cannot do and what she feels frustrated about.

3. Crime, suspense... and psychology

Crime novels (and crime films) are usually described as "whodunnits", i.e. they are targeted at finding who perpetrated the murder at the beginning of the diegesis and the whole story is an investigation. In her Wexford series, with which she started as a writer, Rendell applies this pattern of following Chief Inspector Wexford on the tracks of a murderer. However, these novels also follow the policeman in his personal life and with his personal issues. From that pattern, Rendell slowly derives to a more psychological turn in her non-series writings. Some of Rendell's novels "do

⁸ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.141.

⁹ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.131.

not even feature the investigation of a crime as their central element, but rather concentrate on the psychological-sociological explanation of criminal behaviour. They are usually classified as whydunnits",¹⁰ i.e "the quest of the narrative is not who but why".¹¹

Here, Ruth Rendell is taking a turn from her mistaken assimilation with Christie: "I don't think she was my equal in characterisation and emotional content",¹² Rendell argues. As shown in *A Judgement in Stone*, the name of the killer can be given very early in the novel without taking away the whole of the suspense: the reader does not wonder "who did it?" but rather "why was this character led to do it?" and "will the killer be arrested and what clues will lead towards him/her?".

"If the pleasure of these novels does not rely upon the final pinpointing of a single criminal, then it must also be found in their stories of social and self-discovery".¹³ In the instance of *A Judgement in Stone*, the questions the reader asks himself/herself after the killer is revealed (in the very first sentence: "Eunice Parchman killed the Coverdale family because she could not read or write") are: "Has she always been a bad person? Did her illiteracy bring her to other deeds? What events led her to such an

¹⁰ Ana de Brito, *A guilty thing surprised: Literary Intertextuality in the Novels of Ruth Rendell* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1992), p.31.

¹¹ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.VIII.

¹² Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Authors of Detective Series* (London, McFarland, 2001), p.113.

¹³ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.VIII.

extreme act?”. Here, the suspense lies in the unfolding of the plot rather than in its outcome.

In the case of *The Bridesmaid*, the emphasis is even more on the psychological dimension and analysis of the murderer. The whole novel is an account of Philip’s quest into Senta’s world, trying to identify and understand her. The reader is also learning who Senta is step-by-step, long before finding out that she actually is a murderer. Besides, *The Bridesmaid* does not evoke an actual murder until the last moments of the novel and the only thing that makes the reader expect one is the classification of the book (and of the author) in the crime *genre*. The murderer in the book is long regarded as an odd young woman in love, and the novel itself is more of a melodrama. Rendell manages here to conceal the identity of the murderer and the murder itself in favour of a deeper psychological analysis.

When trying to apply a psychological dimension to her study of female writers, Rowland raises a Freudian theory that can revolutionise the whole understanding of *The Bridesmaid*. She writes:

Freud believed that the self was subjected to the sexual energy of the unconscious desiring ever greater connections and relationships with the other. This other is often understood as other people, but it could also function in objects, activities, and forms of knowledge – in effect, a drive towards participation and life. But this creative energy is

always in tension with a drive towards stasis and inertia,
which Freud understood to be a desire for death.¹⁴

If one applies this psychological model to Philip, it would not be exaggerated to argue that he unconsciously desires Flora (= the other in the shape of an object) so badly that his “creative energy” invented Senta. It would make Senta become a mere fantasy (that Philip as a focaliser introduces to the reader as real since he is unaware of her fictitiousness). It would also justify the fact that she is never really seen in public; let alone at Philip’s sister wedding, at which he could have fantasised her when only Stephanie was a bridesmaid. Then, the “desire for death” he feels could either lead him to fantasise the murders of Rebecca Neave and of the jogger, or to actually perpetrate them. To sum it up, Philip might be a schizophrenic murderer in love with a statue who drives each and every reader into his madness. *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* helps in picturing this hypothesis thanks to shots such as Figure 22, in which Senta is completely left out of the attention focus of every other character but Philippe. Similarly, when the homeless man who lives in front of Senta’s house talks to Philippe about her, the appeal of the money Philippe offers can be interpreted as a salary to talk about an imaginary woman.

¹⁴ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.88.



Figure 22: Senta as a piece of the décor

Ruth Rendell's writings seem to be uncharacteristic of crime fiction. Her works cannot be compared to the group of female crime novelists whose names are widely known (Agatha Christie and P.D. James, to name just a few). Nevertheless, her works have improved the standing of crime fiction: "University lecturers read *A Judgement in Stone* without embarrassment, research projects of postgraduate research students on crime fiction are accepted and actually welcomed and felt to be very stimulating".¹⁵ After having studied Rendell's main writing features, this study shall turn to Chabrol's film-making features before assessing the similarities between the two artists' central themes.

B. Claude Chabrol's cinema

It has been stated that Ruth Rendell was a crime novelist whose works did not fit within the usual encoding of this literary strand. It is common

¹⁵ Ana de Brito, *A guilty thing surprised: Literary Intertextuality in the Novels of Ruth Rendell* (Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1992), p.52.

knowledge that Chabrol belonged to the French “Nouvelle Vague”, created in the 1950s to break with old traditionalist “cinéma de Papa”. The Nouvelle Vague directors aimed to revolutionise film-making in order to break with film-making trends that were ageing, whatever the cost. Some directors even lost touch with the audience and sacrificed commercial success for artistic value. I will now define Chabrol’s cinema by studying his relationship to the audience, and his dealing with the themes of appearances and of family links.

1. Audience-driven works

Chabrol always shoots his films with the viewer’s opinion in the back of his mind: “His concept of cinema privileges the spectator as well as the creator”.¹⁶ His aim is to entertain the public and to make them go to the cinema as often as possible. He even designed an entire scheme that allowed free entry into cinemas with integral payment for the film industry through subventions, but it was never implemented (although submitted to members of the government a few decades ago). Nevertheless, Chabrol also aims to educate and to lead people to think about specific issues; and he raises essential societal matters in his films. Chabrol is currently probably one of the most productive thinkers of the French society: his interviews and his works abound with philosophical theories and moral issues that are controversial. His aim is indubitably to educate through entertainment. He chooses to do so via tools that attract the audience, mainly by using the thriller *genre* which “est

¹⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.4.

le *genre* qui emmerde le moins le public”,¹⁷ thanks to the notion of suspense that is inherent to it.

On the other hand, Chabrol applied this audience-driven strategy up to its extreme as well, which was not entirely beneficial to his reputation. During periods of low income or in order to widen his field of action, Chabrol sometimes accepted projects that did not originate within his production team. He often received scenarios from scriptwriters or famous actors trying to create films and he agreed to direct some of these – not necessarily low budgeted – films. “J’ai fait *Le Sang des Autres* [1984] uniquement pour le fric”,¹⁸ he says. Chabrol was long resented by critics, and by part of the audience, for these films, that even he describes as being of lower quality. He even said he did not put much effort into these in an attempt to retain his talent for better films. However, he does not express many regrets about these films either since he knew in advance that they would not be his best ones and that they were just a few films amongst a great total production. It has to be said, though, that some of Chabrol’s own films were commercial failures and were not worth much in his eyes either with hindsight; so the blame for an uneven production cannot only be placed on others. Chabrol even states that he includes clues in his films to show how good they are through one of his main pleasures in life, food: “Dans certains films qui me plaisent moins, je fais manger des ordures aux personnages”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.4.

¹⁸ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Le Cherche-Midi, 2002), p.86.

¹⁹ Wilfrid Alexandre, *Claude Chabrol: La Traversée des Apparences* (Paris, Felin, 2003), p.16.

Although Chabrol keeps his audience in mind throughout the film-making process, he still refuses to make concessions on concepts that are central to his style. Austin evokes “Chabrol’s tendency to end his films with a moment of unsettling ambivalence rather than the expected narrative closure: people seem to think that the final shot explains everything when the contrary is true. It is a question mark”.²⁰ Chabrol does not satisfy his audience’s craving for answers and he prefers leaving the ending open to interpretations rather than giving answers that he does not necessarily have. In *La Fleur du Mal* (2003), an anonymous letter is received by the mayor that states all the family’s misdeeds, which went on for generations. The author of the letter is never named and, in the extra features of the DVD, Chabrol explains that the people within the film-crew had arguments about who might have written the letter, depending on the interest the characters had in these revelations. Chabrol clearly says he has no answer to this, although the viewer would have been relieved to hear the director reveal the identity of the blackmailer.

Chabrol’s style is a mixture of audience-driven elements and cinematographic concepts that blend in a way that seems to satisfy both film experts and viewers.

²⁰ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.55.

2. The deconstruction of appearances

“Une phrase revient régulièrement dans les films de Chabrol, anodine et généralement introduite de façon tout à fait anecdotique : il ne faut pas se fier aux apparences”.²¹

Chabrol's films usually make a point in showing that appearances are deceitful. The more one wants to hang on to appearances that are falling apart, the more insane one gets. The two films in our corpus both feature characters whose behaviour is dictated by the drive to impress others. The most obvious demonstration of this attitude is Catherine Lelièvre, who feels the need to hire someone to do the lower tasks in the house so that her own image is not tarnished. She also wants to show the maid to her guests at the occasion of Melinda's twentieth birthday; but her desire to impress her audience will be turned down by Sophie's unruly behaviour. Here, appearances fall apart harshly. One can also consider that Jeanne's behaviour is an act that she tries to keep up in order to hide her lack of understanding of the world and her weakness. Her daring way of replying when her work is under attack and her aggressiveness appear to be enough for her to defend herself. Yet, she is a very fragile person who cannot take good care of herself and who fears being pointed out as the village idiot.

Appearances are also a central theme in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*. Many of the characters are acting; they do their best to give an impression of well-being when they actually feel despair and loneliness. It was stated in

²¹ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.59.

Chapter II that Sophie Tardieu seemed to regret her choice of getting married to Jacky, who is a nice person but whose stupidity becomes tiring. Her mother is grieving her late husband and has a very unsuccessful love life, but she will not appear sad to her children and therefore keeps on smiling and talking about any subject other than her loneliness. It has to be noted that these two characters are seen in a mirror just before the wedding, and that the mirror is the symbol of appearances *par excellence* as shown in Chapter II above. “Le miroir renvoie évidemment aux notions de double, de reflet, d’imaginaire, d’inversion et de prise de possession (mentale) d’un être par un autre. Chaque cas a sa propre spécificité”.²² Continuing on the topic of “prise de possession mentale” through a mirror, in *La Demoiselle d’Honneur*, it is interesting to note that Senta masters appearances whilst Philippe is completely unfamiliar with them. The young woman takes total control over Philippe after they have been shown making love in the mirror (see Chapter II). Senta uses appearances to kill her victims: she impersonates her first victim’s boyfriend on the telephone to attract her into a trap and then she acts as a young desperate and fragile woman to kill her second victim. Although the viewer might have doubts about Senta’s being a professional actress, her everyday life leaves no doubt about her acting skills: Senta is an “actor” (as she puts it), and a rather convincing one. A sort of mirror effect applies to Philippe who is incapable of acting: he expresses all his feelings to Senta, cannot repress first the joy and then the sadness he feels because of her at work or at home and most of all he can hardly lie to anybody. However, his

²² Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.172.

acting talents grow thanks to his staying with Senta and, by the end of the film, he becomes a good actor, capable of concealing that he knows about the arrival of the police who have come to fetch Senta and put her in jail for the rest of her life.

But dealing with appearances means more to Chabrol than simply tricking his characters (and viewers). It is a whole societal and relational issue that he raises again and again through his works. He explains that:

Les gens admettent rarement de se reconnaître tels qu'ils sont. A partir du moment où ils refusent d'être ce qu'ils sont, ils veulent devenir quelqu'un d'autre, et ça les entraîne à la folie. Et je crois que le mal est là. Disons que l'éthique humaine consiste à savoir ce que l'on est.²³

Chabrol's films aim to show that accepting what one is is the only way to live. It is denial that leads to incorrect behaviour; as evidenced in many of his films. The character of Patricia in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* sinks deeper and deeper into denial throughout the film. Although one needs to know the source-text to understand this completely, the girl seems to have a problem with gambling and she simply refuses to admit it. She is drawn to steal money from her relatives and to commit petty theft to feed her need to gamble. Since she will not admit her problem, she goes from begging towards stealing and this could lead her to even more dangerous extremes. In *La Cérémonie*, Sophie is the one who will not admit her problem. The maid is illiterate, which "n'est certainement pas de [sa] faute" as George puts it and

²³ Christian Blanchet, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Rivages, 1989), p.110.

which could be solved with some effort (Melinda even offers her help) but that requires acceptance, a step that Sophie is not ready to take. It is interesting to note that Sophie does not know what she is since she does not understand the word “analphabète” when Melinda says it. This corresponds exactly to what Chabrol said about not knowing what one is (see quotation above). Sophie refuses to be what she is and this leads her to madness.

If Chabrol's characters try to hide what they really are, one could wonder if this feature can also be applied to the director himself. “Je n'ai pas l'impression de porter des masques. A moins que tout le monde n'en porte”²⁴. It raises the question of the authenticity of his representation of society: are the characters in his films an accurate representation of real life people who try to keep up appearances? One of Chabrol's most famous quotations is an answer in itself here: “A mon avis, il n'y a pas de grands ou de petits sujets, parce que plus le sujet est petit, plus on peut le traiter avec grandeur. En vérité, il n'y a que la vérité”.²⁵ Chabrol only shoots the truth so he believes that appearances are necessarily deceitful and that people who avoid the truth can be driven to act wrongly. Chabrol only offers a partial solution to society:

Je crois que les gens ne peuvent pas être heureux tant qu'ils
vivent dans les apparences, donc la première chose à faire

²⁴ Wilfrid Alexandre, *Claude Chabrol: La Traversée des Apparences* (Paris, Felin, 2003), p.13.

²⁵ Claude Chabrol, « Les Petits Sujets » (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma n.100, 1959) in Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.192.

est de les traverser. Je ne dis pas que c'est la solution, mais
c'est la moindre des choses.²⁶

Appearances are a theme that is central to Chabrol's works and investing this thoroughly would require book-length study. They are everywhere and they always lead to serious consequences. Another theme that is central to Chabrol's works is that of the family bonds.

3. Family portrait(s)

Chabrol's works are always deeply related to family, be it amongst the characters or even amongst the film crew. It is well-known that Chabrol always works with the same crew, which comprises of members of his own family (all of his three wives and two sons at different levels from film production to acting, including script-supervising and music). One could also see the Nouvelle Vague filmic current as a family in which all brothers were in league against the "cinéma de papa" in order to launch their own film style.

I shall study the way in which the creation of Chabrol's films is linked to the concept of family by studying family within his oeuvre. I will then draw a parallel between family life and isolation in our corpus.

a) Family in the films

First and foremost, it has to be said that in Chabrol's films, the concept of family is linked to the concept of bourgeoisie because of its notion of stability and comfort. This point will be studied in relation to Rendell's novels in III.C.2 below.

²⁶ Wilfrid Alexandre, *Claude Chabrol: La Traversée des Apparences* (Paris, Felin, 2003), p.176.

In Chabrol's oeuvre, the family goes through different steps but none of them seems to be a positive representation of the concept. The first of his works to feature a child is short-film *La Muette* (1965), in which the young boy uses earplugs to escape from his parents' constant fights. His mother accidentally falls down the stairs and the young boy will not be able to help the woman in agony since he did not hear this final fight between his parents (which resulted in the woman's fall). This short-film already deals with violence within the family and with the breach of communication, which can be fatal. In *Juste Avant la Nuit* (1971), the parents will do anything to keep up appearances and go so far as to conceal the husband's accidental murder of his lover. His guilt and the pressure of having to lie and hide what tortures his conscience will lead his wife to gently put an end to his pain by giving him an overdose of sedatives. If pretending nothing was wrong when the husband had an affair was a sort of middle-ground solution so as not to lose the family's honour, it is what killed him eventually. Therefore, the solution to a happy family life does not seem to be in lying.

The films of our corpus seem to draw a parallel between families and solitary individuals (see III.B.3.b) below). Chabrol's films produced more recently tend to study relations amongst the family members. For instance, *La Fleur du Mal* (2003) shows a family whose links are too close. This film deals with incest and reproaches the family members for living deliberately secluded (although the mother seems to be seeking a role outside the home, a symbol of doom in melodrama as studied in Chapter II). This theme had already been evoked in 1978 with *Violette Nozière* who accused her father of abusing her in

their one-bedroom apartment. However, these allegations were judged unreliable and this fact reveals more about Violette's disturbed behaviour than about the Nozière family themselves.

It has been seen that family in Chabrol's oeuvre is very present as a theme, but also that it never functions properly. Is Chabrol's point that, as no family seems to be happy in his films, isolation is a better way of life? Our corpus tends to prove the opposite: Chabrol seems to praise family bonds instead of loneliness, as I shall now demonstrate.

b) Family bonds versus isolation

Be it in *La Cérémonie* or in *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Chabrol's families seem to clash with solitary individuals. The relations between members of a family and independent people are always very extreme, and most of the time quite destructive. In *La Cérémonie*, it is solitude that is the main common point between Jeanne and Sophie. They appear to have no family since they are believed to have murdered the only relatives they had (Sophie let her father die in a fire and Jeanne threw her daughter on the kitchen stove but they were never judged because "on n'a rien pu prouver"). Their solitude leads them to boredom and as soon as Jeanne realises that Sophie is lonely too, she preys on her to escape her own loneliness. Their feeling of loneliness contrasts with the Lelièvres' unity as a family. They all get along very well and keep on embracing each other and expressing their love. Even Gilles, who is a rather individualistic teenager, indulges in an occasional hug with his mother. This contrast simply highlights the maid and the postmistress's solitude and, in a way, their mistake of getting rid of their last

relative. In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, Senta is the main representative of loneliness. She is said to have lost her mother at birth and never to have known her father, and to have been adopted. Her surrogate parents (her aunt and her new boyfriend) do not pay much attention to her at all and, even though they claim to be sad for not seeing much of Senta, all they care about is their dance contests. This is part of the reason why Senta cannot help but be so intense with Philippe: she needs to get from him all the love one usually receives from one's family. However, Senta is completely opposed to the idea of meeting Philippe's family and becoming part of it. She only comes to his house when people are away or on their way out. Being part of a family does not seem to appeal to her.

If Senta, Jeanne and Sophie do not want to take part into family life, it is because they refuse the notion of trust that is attached to it, and the fact that family is a bourgeois concept (see III.B.3.a) above). Both at the Lelièvres and at the Tardieus, a sense of trust seems to rule the household. It is demonstrated by the fact that Melinda admits she might be pregnant although she had avoided the topic of being sexually active until then. It also shows during the wedding scene at the Tardieus when the bride reveals to her mother her doubts about getting married. As our killers are constantly lying, they seem to believe that people who claim to be honest are necessarily hiding something. The best example of this everlasting suspicion is Jeanne's – rather lame – accusations about Catherine Lelièvre who, she claims, stole her job in a TV advert when they were young.

It is interesting to note that members of a family crave a return home as soon as work is finished in order to see their family and spend some time with them. In contrast, people who are lonely do their best not to stay home when they do not have to: Sophie escapes the house on Sundays to avoid staying alone in her rooftop bedroom; Jeanne visits Sophie as often as possible and goes away when on holiday and Senta simply disappears from her place when Philippe is not around.

Chabrol's families are always fragmented and they often harbour immoral dysfunctions. In our corpus, they echo with the loneliness of the killers who, out of frustration, are drawn to put an end to the apparent peacefulness of households. I will now study the themes that interest both Chabrol and Rendell.

C. Rendell and Chabrol's common values

After having studied in what ways the authors in our corpus stand out from the categories they are said to belong in, I shall study the common themes of their works in relation to each other.

1. An original way of dealing with crime

To start with, it is obvious that the works in our corpus and most of Rendell's and Chabrol's oeuvres deal with murder. Their way of dealing with it stands out from the rest of the production but do they attach importance to the same elements?

a) Crime as the result of a psychological process

Both Rendell and Chabrol are interested in showing that crime is not something that occurs randomly. Their aim is to show through their works that murderers are drawn to this extreme out of desperation. To achieve such demonstration, they focus their creations on a psychological study of the murderers. Whilst Chabrol claims “Je suis pour les intrigues simples aux personnages complexes”,²⁷ Rendell explains: “I found that I preferred to deal with the psychological, emotional aspects of human nature”.²⁸ It is rather amusing to see that one’s words can shed further light on the other’s: they do work the same way, with the same aim.

Giving this direction to her works, Rendell confused a lot of readers but most of them wondered “if the pleasure of these novels does not rely upon the final pinpointing of a single criminal, then it must also be found in their stories of social and self-discovery”.²⁹ Self-discovery is a crucial matter in Rendell’s works: when one does not know who they are, they are drawn to commit atrocities. She describes her works in these words:

The development of a human personality is what I am interested in. I like to work on characters. I want to know what will become of them... I think people can be driven to commit murder, and I’m very interested in the pressures that

²⁷ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.68.

²⁸ Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Authors of Detective Series* (London, McFarland, 2001), p.112.

²⁹ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.VIII.

are put on people and the stresses that they suffer from other people.³⁰

As stated in III.A.1 above, this is what differentiates Rendell from other crime novelists. She chooses to see murder as a step in a character's life; the reasons that led the character to do it are at the centre of a Rendell novel. However, she is also interested in studying the consequences murder will have on his or her everyday life and conscience: "Rendell generally examines a central character who is in a state of crisis. [...] The character's life is being altered by a crime which he has perpetrated or in which he is in some other way entangled".³¹

Chabrol's attitude towards murder is very similar to Rendell's. However, he also discussed the effect that violence might have on the audience and explained his choices as regards the level of violence featured in his films:

Dans mes films la violence est urbaine, de bon ton, pas exagérée. Car, pour être vraisemblable, la violence fictive doit être édulcorée par rapport à ce qu'on voit dans les reportages d'actualité. Je veux qu'elle soit bien située dans son contexte moral, qu'elle soit bien comprise.³²

In order to have violence understood by the spectator, Chabrol has to show where it is rooted. He wishes to justify the acts of his murderers and

³⁰ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.128.

³¹ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.128.

³² Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.314.

explain their frustration in order to make the spectator empathise with the simple character who had no other choice but to kill. However, some characters in Chabrol's films are killed for no apparent reason, but their death is always – more or less – accidental. One can think of the young boy who is hit by a car in *Que la Bête Meure* (1969), of the mistress who is strangled to death during a sadistic sex-game in *Juste Avant la Nuit* (1971) and of the powerless young woman strangled as an excess of sexual desire in *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960). As shown in III.B.2 above, what Chabrol wants to show is that appearances and refusal to accept oneself can lead to murder: “quand les personnages persistent dans leur illusion et tentent d'y conformer la réalité et le comportement d'autrui, on débouche inmanquablement sur le tragique : meurtre, démence ou mort”.³³

What has to be remembered about the way in which Rendell and Chabrol deal with crime is that they do not use murder and violence as a way to impress, entertain or satisfy the reader's thirst for violence but as a way of leading him/her to think about murderers in another way. Their aim is to show that even the people who commit murder remain human beings and to lead their audience to wonder “Would I not have acted the same way in such circumstances?” Chabrol even says that “le retour à la norme me paraît plus inquiétant que la folie”³⁴ because “l'ennui est le pire des crimes car le crime

³³ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.36.

³⁴ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.79.

est le fruit de l'ennui":³⁵ therefore, being normal might also be a reason to be drawn to crime.

b) Suspense revisited: explicit pinpointing

Both Rendell and Chabrol have adopted an unusual approach as regards suspense: the use of clues about the unfolding of the story that can sometimes be very explicit from a very early stage of the story.

Chabrol has at his disposal a whole set of filmic tools that he can use to suggest elements to his viewer. Most of them are visual, such as "the manipulation of decors and objects to convey atmosphere and meaning".³⁶ For instance, and as shown in Chapter II, the presence of a mirror, or of a window in general, has to do with "notions de double, de reflet, d'imaginaire, d'inversion et de prise de possession (mentale) d'un être par un autre".³⁷ Therefore, when a mirror is featured in a film by Chabrol, it is because one of the characters either dreams of escaping or needs to hide something. The staircase, which was also studied as a *film noir* element in Chapter II, can be a sign of frustration due to the lack of ascension in the social ladder or a sign of mental instability in the case of a spiral staircase, symbolising the twist in a character's mind.

Rendell also plays with details and clues that she gives to the reader innocently: "Items which appear earlier and are seemingly unrelated

³⁵ Christian Blanchet, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Rivages, 1989), p.66.

³⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.9.

³⁷ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.172.

suddenly achieve significance”.³⁸ For instance, in *The Bridesmaid*, the incessant comments of Philip’s sisters on Rebecca Neave’s disappearance are long viewed as mere conversation topics but the end of the novel reveals that the young woman was murdered by Senta, one of the main characters, just before the start of the *récit*. In *A Judgement in Stone*, it is not the mention of a character but that of a room that is a clue in itself: the gun room keeps on reappearing as a room through which the characters only walk but mentioning it is a clue to the viewer that there are guns in the house, and that they will become of some use later in the plot. As well as creating a radical change from the other crime-stories, working this way is a very effective solution to lead the audience to pay more attention to what surrounds them and to interpret signs of despair before something serious happens.

For Chabrol, it is important to deceive the expectations of the audience and to keep on surprising them in order not to repeat *motifs* he has already used. His ideal construction for a film is as such: “Il faudrait que ce soit le moment le plus farfelu, le plus délirant qui contienne la vérité. A l’inverse, quand on a l’air de dire une chose sérieuse, il faut que ce soit de la grosse pitrerie”.³⁹ Rendell’s aim is to change the focus of attention of the reader from the events themselves to the reasons why they occurred: “[Rendell’s non-series books] are usually suspense stories, often inverted

³⁸ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.126.

³⁹ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.49.

mysteries, in which the criminal and his crime are identified early; the suspense arises from the reader's knowledge of the horrors to come".⁴⁰

c) Lack of closure

The ultimate trick Rendell and Chabrol both use is to finish the *récit* before the *histoire* has come to a real end, leaving their characters in a situation that is not set into stone.

Regarding Ruth Rendell's second literary identity, Barbara Vine, Rowland describes a "lack of traditional closure: Vine novels leave some aspects of the crime as indecipherable, usually connoting something unknowable, even sublime, about human characters at the extremity of passion".⁴¹ This way of leaving some shadow on the murderer at the end of the novel is another attempt to incite the reader to think by himself/herself of the missing links, to try and figure out by himself/herself why the characters were drawn to such actions. Rowland carries on with the specificity of Rendell's lack of closure: "indigenous to Barbara Vine's crime fiction is the exacerbation of the lack of closure in the types of knowledge available to both [her] reader and her detecting figure".⁴² Thus, it can be said that Rendell pushes the lack of closure to its extreme by not only leaving the reader deprived of answers, but also by suggesting that the characters themselves did not reach a firm conclusion. For instance, the ending of *The Bridesmaid*

⁴⁰ Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.126.

⁴¹ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.48.

⁴² Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.91.

leaves the reader wondering whether Senta will be caught for her deeds and whether Philip will have to pay for being her accomplice to some extent. However, the novel ends with Philip's thoughts that the police will send a patrol to fetch them and the policemen are never said to arrive at Senta's: when the novel ends, the characters and the reader are at the same level of knowledge – or rather of ignorance.

Chabrol works the same way as regards the end of his films: "j'arrête toujours le film avant la scène finale. J'ai toujours préféré que la boucle de l'histoire ne se ferme pas complètement [...] c'est de la manipulation de spectateur, née directement de la manipulation du lecteur dans le livre"⁴³. Chabrol has adopted this strategy and he claims to have ended only two films on the happy-ending lovers' kiss: *Le Tigre Aime la Chair Fraîche* and *Le Tigre se Parfume à la Dynamite*, which, according to him, are amongst to the worst films he shot. Hence, a good Chabrol film necessarily ends with an open ending. In our corpus, both films finish with murderers that seem to be doomed, but they remain uncaught, and they could still make an escape. *La Cérémonie*'s last shots show Sophie walking peacefully away from the crime scene whilst a record of her murder is being played ("[Sophie] escapes closure... [She] literally escapes from the frame, walking away from the house, the crime scene, and the flashing lights of the police"⁴⁴). In *La Demoiselle d'Honneur*, as in the source-novel, Senta and Philippe are waiting for the police in the basement but they are never shown being caught.

⁴³ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.204.

⁴⁴ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.158.

If both films end in an open manner, it is interesting to see that the sets are very different: Sophie walks out in the open during the night as opposed to Senta who is static in a basement. In other words, Sophie is still moving and capable of making an escape as opposed to Senta who is inert and trapped. However, the camera-movement that concludes the films is the same: the camera slowly zooms out from an upper angle, which echoes a feeling of powerlessness of the characters who, the film suggests, will be caught.

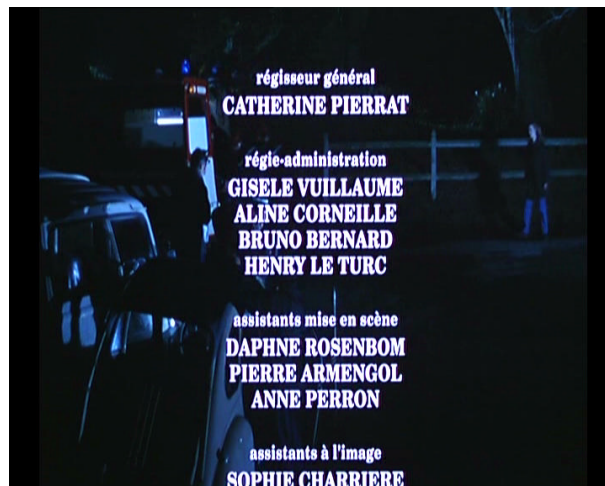


Figure 23: Sophie walks away from the crime scene



Figure 24: Senta is trapped in the basement

Rendell and Chabrol's dealing with crime are very similar. Another value that they fight for is the destruction of the social hierarchy.

2. Social struggle

The main reason for Sophie and Jeanne's crime in *La Cérémonie* is the frustration they are faced with everyday because they belong to the lower class. This theme offers endless possibilities in terms of resolution possibilities and I will now study Rendell's and Chabrol's oeuvres through the lens of social struggles.

a) Social struggle in Rendell's and Chabrol's oeuvres

As shown above, Ruth Rendell is a very socially aware author. Being herself the target of social oppression as a woman with a job, and especially as a learned woman, she knows how brutal society can be when it comes to reminding one of their attributed rank. In her works, gender oppressions and class oppressions are equal and they belong to the same fight. Rowland evokes a "desperation induced by class, gender and erotic submission in an unequal relationship".⁴⁵

In her novels, Rendell uses murder "not as an anomaly within class structures of potential social order, but crucially implicated within social forms of class and gender".⁴⁶ in her crime fiction, murder is not a happening within a

⁴⁵ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.41.

⁴⁶ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.59.

social class but it is the result of the interaction of the different social classes; another point in which her works differ from those of Agatha Christie.

Rendell even pushes her theory further by saying that the interaction of social classes is not the problem in itself; it is their very existence that leads to social oppressions:

[One can interpret] Rendell's citing of class as the social problem liable to provoke disorder rather than maintain social stability. For Rendell, traditional class structures do not regulate desire but instead collide with it, often leading to crimes where individual murderous impulses cannot be isolated from more general social oppressions.⁴⁷

Social oppression in Rendell's oeuvre is a catalyst leading to murder, but what about in Chabrol's works?

In contrast to Rendell, Chabrol expressed a lot of views on class interactions and on why he is fascinated with them. Firstly, he does not fear to admit that he himself used to be a bourgeois: "La bourgeoisie est un milieu que je connais parfaitement bien puisque j'en suis issu. Et j'en suis sorti aussi, enfin j'espère..."⁴⁸ Arguably, this hindsight on the bourgeoisie is a proof that Chabrol left this social class. He then started working on it in order to find what was wrong with this social class, and why it was the source of so much trouble. His conclusions are rather radical: "l'argent, c'est le sang de la société. Un sang contaminé. Les sociétés vivent avec un sang contaminé. Il

⁴⁷ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.42.

⁴⁸ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.50.

faut en tenir compte: en avoir le moins possible et en purifier le plus possible”.⁴⁹ One could contradict him by saying that being a director is a wealthy situation, but this is what the purification process is about: reinvesting money in film-making in order to educate the society about its flaws is the best way not to grant too much importance to money. This is what the bourgeois are criticised for, after all: “ce qui m’intéressait avant chez les bourgeois, c’est qu’ils se fabriquaient des problèmes de cul car ils n’avaient pas de problèmes de fric. Aujourd’hui, ils ne pensent plus qu’au fric”.⁵⁰

Money is the main problem according to Chabrol: it is what makes the bourgeoisie so different from other social classes and it is the source of frustrations. In order to virtually punish the bourgeois on screen, Chabrol has dealt with them many times in his career. He claims: “j’aime bien les voleurs parce que, plus que les assassins, ils emmerdent les gens que j’ai envie d’emmerder”,⁵¹ i.e. the people who own valuables.

As a matter of fact, Chabrol does not entirely criticise the bourgeois and is also ready to acknowledge the good in some of them: “je trouve bizarrement que les gens riches ont plus de mérite d’être de braves riches, malgré leur fric, que les braves pauvres à être de braves pauvres”.⁵² But Chabrol will rarely show charitable rich people in his films: after all, the only

⁴⁹ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.58.

⁵⁰ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.55.

⁵¹ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.50.

⁵² Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.61.

way to purify his money is to spend it in an educative criticism of those who keep theirs.

“La bourgeoisie, de toutes les ethnies, c’est quand même la plus marrante”,⁵³ Chabrol says, proving that he feels a real pleasure in its depiction.

b) Social struggle in *A Judgement in Stone*/*La Cérémonie*

Although the word is never applied to Rendell’s works (in a Cold War context, it might have been a little frowned upon), Marxism is a central theme in *A Judgement in Stone* and, *a fortiori* in *La Cérémonie*. “En ce moment, je me dis que le marxisme-léninisme n’est pas plus con qu’autre chose”,⁵⁴ Chabrol says, and he shows it in this film. The root of the social issue is that the bourgeois are careless about the other social classes and, sometimes unwittingly, they cannot help being condescending towards the lower classes. Rendell criticises this attitude as Rowland explains: “*A Judgement in Stone*, for example, is Rendell’s most sustained critique of a social role that golden age writers took for granted as unproblematic, the servant class”.⁵⁵ To Rendell, subjugating people from lower classes is highly immoral and she uses her crime fiction as a way of denouncing this injustice. However, the bourgeois family is very kind and affectionate towards their servant, both in the novel and in the film: they do not want to appear as pretentious rich people. They manage to do so rather well, leaving aside the

⁵³ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.50.

⁵⁴ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.92.

⁵⁵ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.42.

irrepressible commands occasionally given out of habit ("Il n'y a pas de sucre?", Melinda asks when she has tea with Sophie, implying that the maid ought to go and get some). To Chabrol, "la famille bourgeoise n'est attaquable que par son état, c'est ça le marxisme".⁵⁶ however hard their efforts may be, the Lelièvres cannot compensate what they are with the way they act.

Both Rendell and Chabrol want their audience to ask themselves the right question: is it the Coverdales'/Lelièvres' fault in the end? At a glance, they seem to be responsible for what happens to them: "[the Lelièvres] fail, politically speaking, to frame their efforts in any other form than that of master-servant relations",⁵⁷ as shown above with Melinda. Yet, if the way the family behave towards their maid is part and parcel of their fate, it is not the only explanation: "the Lelièvre family are unobjectionable. Their only fault is in fact simply their function – as Sophie's employers, and as the embodiment of the bourgeoisie".⁵⁸ Clearly, the lapses in the family's behaviour are insignificant and they have little to do with the maid's frustration: it is what they are, what they stand for, that kills them. In addition to the class struggle itself, another element plays against the family, as evidenced by Rowland's study about the novel: "The Coverdales' love of literature is fatally contaminated by class complacency as they try to live out a fantasy of a Victorian novel with deferential servants".⁵⁹ In other words, intertwined with their social rank is

⁵⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.155.

⁵⁷ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.155.

⁵⁸ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.153.

⁵⁹ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.155.

their love for literature, another argument against them for their illiterate maid who is, once again, left apart from something they cherish.

If it appears obvious to the audience that this crime is Marxist and has a social value, it is very unlikely that the killers themselves realise the significance of their deed. Studies about the novel clearly state that “it is [the maid] who is truly marginal to society, excluded by class deprivations, repressed by social forces she cannot comprehend”;⁶⁰ and so do studies about the film: “Claude met en scène la condamnation à mort d’une classe sociale qui doit expier ses fautes”.⁶¹ This is one of the points that link Jeanne and Sophie to the Papin sisters the most: “The Papins’ political awareness may have been at best minimal, but Le Guillant makes it clear that what they carried out was a political act, and one with profoundly ambiguous implications”⁶². Nevertheless, Austin states: “it is impossible to say whether Sophie and Jeanne commit the murders in order to avenge personal humiliations [...] or to reverse power relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie”.⁶³ However, at the scale of the plot, it is hard to believe that the maid and the postmistress do realise that they killed the family because they felt undermined by their wealth. They might even be completely unaware that

⁶⁰ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.155.

⁶¹ Wilfrid Alexandre, *Claude Chabrol: La Traversée des Apparences* (Paris, Felin, 2003), p.169.

⁶² Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader, *The Papin Sister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.50.

⁶³ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.152.

they belong to different social classes and that they are being exploited by the socially dominant (from a Marxist point-of-view)

c) Social solutions offered by Rendell and Chabrol

Chabrol's solution to undermine the effect of social discrepancy is a little radical: "changer la société? Je crois qu'il y a deux cents salauds à tuer, après ça, ça ira bien mieux".⁶⁴ However, it might prove to be a little too authoritarian, something which Chabrol justifies by saying:

Je crois que je n'aurais eu aucun problème pour faire ce que je voulais dans un régime marxiste. Je serais devenu Artiste du Peuple. Et en tant qu'Artiste du Peuple, j'aurais eu le droit de faire tout ce que j'aurais voulu.⁶⁵

Looking past the witty remarks, Chabrol genuinely tries to help society realise its faults and by slaughtering the bourgeois family in his film, he wants people to realise that these social injustices can no longer go on in modern society. He claims to have achieved this in yet another joke about this film:

Avec *La Cérémonie*, un film que j'ai qualifié de marxiste, j'ai tellement inquiété les intellos de gauche qu'à leur retour de vacances, affolés, ils ont foutu leurs bonniches à la porte. Il y a eu des mouvements ancillaires considérables en 1995!⁶⁶

For Rendell's part, the issue is to be treated more seriously. Rendell offers a worst case scenario to her readers in order for them to realise

⁶⁴ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.62.

⁶⁵ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.64.

⁶⁶ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.101.

that change is to be considered very seriously: “in effect, the social order that Rendell’s works wish to imply is in the form of a hope for future reform”.⁶⁷ Besides, the trend of writers to which she belongs and who also dealt with social discrepancy defend the view that:

Social class needs to expand and mutate in order to survive in modernity as a stabilising social structure. Part of that expansion is a desire to relegitimise class by prescribing a moral dimension and a duty of consideration towards aspirants from below.⁶⁸

The theme of social struggle is a common theme to Rendell and Chabrol, and they deal with it the same way: they want to scare their audience so that they act upon these differences and tear them down.

3. Feminism or misogyny?

In our corpus, the murders are perpetrated by women. Most thrillers have featured male murderers and often male detectives as well (Agatha Christie’s *Hercule Poirot* being the most famous one) and it is not until very recently in crime fiction history that women have achieved to be seen as threatening. But does this really help the feminist movement or does it have to do with the male fantasy of the *femme fatale*?

⁶⁷ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.40.

⁶⁸ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.40.

a) Chabrol's fake misogyny

Chabrol – being a witty man driven by a slight taste for controversy – occasionally pronounces sentences or creates films that might be seen as misogynistic. He once wrote “J’ai quelques règles de vie. Fuir les grignoteuses en est une”,⁶⁹ which assumes that some women are vain and dishonest. Obviously, he only calls a certain type of women “grignoteuses” but it might be felt as slightly offensive. Furthermore, one of his less understood films is *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960), which shows four female shop assistants having a lot of time in their hands. He discredits their attitudes and conversation topics. This film was poorly received by the audience back in the early 1960s and not only was Chabrol criticised for its content, but for the very slow unfolding of its plot too.

In spite of these *faux-pas* – or these provocations aimed to reconsider the role of women in a still-biased society – Chabrol also helped women to get more importance in society throughout his oeuvre. “Lorsqu’elles sont interprétées par Stéphane Audran, [les personnages nommés Hélène] évolueront volontiers d’une situation passive à un rôle actif”.⁷⁰ For instance, in *Juste Avant la Nuit* (1971), Hélène is cheated upon by her husband and, although she is aware of this fact, she remains very passive about it. But after accidentally killing his mistress, Charles feels so guilty that he considers suicide, although he is too cowardly to actually take his own life. This is when Hélène becomes an active character and decides that she will help her

⁶⁹ Claude Chabrol, *Pensées, Répliques et Anecdotes* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 2002), p.31.

⁷⁰ Joel Magny, *Claude Chabrol* (Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), p.78.

husband to die, by giving him an overdose of sedatives. She does not kill him out of revenge or frustration; she only seizes the opportunity to get control over her own life and over her relatives'. And this is not only true about the Hélène cycle, but also about many other films. In *Les Biches* (1967), Chabrol shows how women can seize power over men in a relationship and also in a financial context (Frédérique is a very wealthy and attractive young woman). This film also goes so far as to make the male figure redundant by developing a homosexual relationship between Frédérique and the homeless artist she wants to help out, mysteriously named Why.

More recently, Chabrol has given high powers to characters played by Isabelle Huppert in *Merci Pour le Chocolat* (2000) in which she slowly and patiently poisons people standing in her way and in *L'Ivresse du Pouvoir* (2006), in which she is a very powerful judge who is not scared by the intimidation attempts targeted at her for being a woman. In this film, the female judge is especially brave since she continues her investigation and pins down all the suspects she finds despite being in physical danger herself.

Throughout Chabrol's career in cinema, female characters have starred, have been praised and analysed, but have never been exaggerated or *clichéd*.

b) Rendell's literary weapons

As previously seen, literature (and mostly melodrama) has a tradition of punishing women who seek a role outside the household. However, this tradition was quickly overturned since "as professional women

in a century of rapid social change, [female crime novelists of the twentieth century] are inevitably fascinated by tensions over female participation in society".⁷¹ Amongst their number is Ruth Rendell.

Rendell does not punish female characters for looking for a role outside their home but she punishes women who are vain and selfish. Her aim is to help women become aware that they should have the same rights as men, and that behaving as a stereotypical woman is not the way forward in this matter.

[A female character from Rendell's *A Guilty Thing Surprised*]
is utterly preoccupied with her own beauty and
fashionableness; she loves the clothes, unguents, and
beautiful furnishings her husband's money brings her, and
she ignores her misery [...] But selfishness does not go
unpunished in a Rendell novel.⁷²

However, Rendell is aware that women who were raised in a sexist society cannot change their attitude that easily. The focus of her argument is that a woman can reverse or put in balance the power relations in her own home as a first step. "[Rendell] investigate[s] power structured through domesticity: the varying, often oppressive constructions of the feminine

⁷¹ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.157.

⁷² Earl F. Bargainnier, *Ten Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green, University Popular Press, 1981), p.144.

throughout the century, result in forms of domestic feminine power and assertiveness”.⁷³

Another manner of empowering women in society, is the fact that Rendell did not try to ram into society's bias against women, but instead used her works as an approach to change. Talking about her series-novels, she once said: “At the time Wesford [sic] was introduced, men were the people and women the others. According to her, had her chief character come into existence in the 1980s, she would probably have chosen a woman”.⁷⁴

c) Feminism in our corpus

As in all the previous novels, feminine stereotypes become problematised by the plot. Can the nurse, daughter figure, female artist, beloved female writer, harmless spinster kill? All the novels discover through crime that gender is a spectrum containing its own contradictions and otherness rather than any fixed set of qualities.⁷⁵

Both stories in our corpus use female characters as killers. These characters are worrying and as dangerous as male killers in other crime fictions. Featuring female killers is a way for Rendell and Chabrol to say that women can take each and every role in society as well as men. Their point is that women are not to be seen as frail or harmless since, as human beings,

⁷³ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.166.

⁷⁴ Moira Davison Reynolds, *Women Authors of Detective Series* (London, McFarland, 2001), p.114.

⁷⁵ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British women writers in detective and crime fiction* (New-York, Palgrave, 2001), p.38.

they are also capable of the worst deeds. This way of representing women is certainly not laudatory, but it confirms the point that if women can be responsible for the worst (like murder), they can most definitely also be responsible for the best in society.

As regards strong women within the family frame, these works also shed light on a feminist argument. It is true that Christine Tardieu, who works at home and appears as the perfect housewife, is in a better position at the end of *La Demoiselle d'Honneur* than Catherine Lelièvre in *La Cérémonie*. It could be argued that the rules of melodrama apply here to Catherine (as she was killed for “seeking a role outside the home”⁷⁶) but she was probably not killed for what she did but for what she was: a member of the bourgeoisie (as shown in III.C.2.b) above).

In spite of the occasional interpretation of some of his works as misogynistic, Chabrol is keen on granting the same importance to women in society as the one men get. Rendell also fights for this, although in a subtler and less controversial way.

⁷⁶ Guy Austin, *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), p.135.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to shed more light on the adaptation process. It was also to carry out an in-depth case-study of successful adaptations in order to shed light on the procedures undertaken.

From a narrative point-of-view, it has been shown that both literature and cinema benefit from tools unavailable to the other medium, leading them to narrate similar stories in different ways. These constraints can hardly be worked around and, instead of fighting them, Chabrol decides to embrace them and make the most of his own medium. However, filmic constraints force him to make a selection in the events and in the characterisation and to focus on the central plot only, leaving material aside. What he leaves aside is either dealt with in later productions or hinted at, so that the viewer understands there is more about it in the source-novel. Rendell's novels main feature is undoubtedly the presence of an external omniscient narrator who maliciously enjoys confusing the reader. This is a very challenging notion to translate into cinema productions but Chabrol uses visual tools such as camera angles in a way that equals and sometimes goes even further than Rendell's narration.

I then turned to a study of *genres* to, first, define their purpose and effect and, then, compare common *genres'* main features to the films in our corpus, aiming to classify them. This part of the study revealed that *genre* is not an exclusive concept. Chabrol chooses to blend genres in his films and to

intertwine them effectively, so that most of the elements can either belong to one *genre* or another. Rendell also challenges the notion of *genre* in her works by featuring several of them (crime fiction and melodrama, mainly). Chabrol builds on this to make the structure of the adaptations even more complex and blends three genre in his adaptations of Rendell's novels.

Finally, I had a thorough look at both artists' careers and *oeuvres* and gave a summary of their professional achievements. The aim of that study was to see whether Rendell's novels had been written in a "Chabrolian" way. The result of this study was highly interesting: although Chabrol amended the source-plots to make the adaptations fit into his aesthetics, the themes common to both authors are numerous. The matters that are crucial to each of them are common to both, and each of them uses their own tools to raise awareness amongst society. These crucial matters include class struggle and the role of women in society. Both authors also lead deep reflexions on the role of their art in society and on the perception of crime fiction in order to make it evolve in an efficient warning about societal derivations.

If the first aim of this dissertation was merely to find out strategies to adapt novels into films, the target of the study quickly shifted to a more valuable question: that of intertextuality in a broad sense. With this dissertation, I hope to have proved wrong the prejudiced – and yet very common – opinion that film adaptation is only a lack of creativity and an artistic theft ("adaptations are seen as parasitical on literature, they burrow

into the body of the source text and steal its vitality”¹). I hope to have shown that both the source-works and their adaptations have an intrinsic value but must also be used in relation to each other, in order to complement each other’s gaps, which necessarily result from medium-specific constraints. Stam denounces “a Darwinian struggle to the death rather than a dialogue offering mutual benefits and cross-fertilisation”.²

My argumentation joins that of the theorists who claim that a discourse of fidelity is out of context in adaptation studies. It has to be made clear, though, that some adaptations have a crucial lack of quality but this can only be attributed to production teams’ budgets or choices and not to the differences between the source-work and the adaptation. I would also be inclined to believe that this view has to be applied to other domains and not only to cinema and literature. Theatre productions and the music industry also comprise of adaptations, modernisations and generic shifts. They, too, ought to be analysed and understood before being rejected straightaway as victims of a mistaken *déjà-vu* impression.

Arguably, Rendell provided Chabrol with a diegetic canvass onto which he built his adaptations by blending his own themes and obsessions, thereby creating two filmic masterpieces through the process of adaptation.

¹ Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.7.

² Robert Stam, *Literature and Film, A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, Blackwell, 2005), p.4.

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